

# FOREWORD

(WRITTEN FOR MY GRANDCHILDREN)

**O**F course you never knew your Uncle Frits, for he died long before you were born. I am sorry. You would have loved him. He was like one of those elderly gentlemen in Central Park who go around feeding birds and squirrels. Their pockets are filled with everything these small creatures may like to eat. The birds and the squirrels sense this and they perch on the shoulders of their benefactors and climb all over them in quest of what they consider their legitimate belongings.

In the case of Frits, who would have been your 'honorary' uncle if he had lived, gaiety and kindness and tolerance and understanding were the gifts he bestowed upon the world. Wherever he went he squandered these rare possessions in a most magnificent and bountiful manner, for he knew (what all wise people have realized since the beginning of time) that the only treasures which are truly ours are those we lay up in the hearts of our friends.

In the country of my birth, still suffering from the after-effects of the great Calvinistic ice age of the sixteenth century, a personality like his was as welcome as it was unexpected, and, in spite of a considerable difference in years, we had become fast friends just five minutes after we had met in the dining-room of the beloved old abbey of Middelburg.

That period of intimacy lasted only a few years, but those were the happiest years of my life, for they were spent in Veere, and the magic of that delectable ruin (a veritable city and the capital of a regular marquisate), consisting of a few hundred decrepit houses, a number of gardens, and endless memories—the enchantment of that queer little paradise was such that we rarely felt the need of any contact with the rest of the world and we thought with infinite pity of our poor contemporaries, doomed to spend their days in such dull and unimaginative hamlets as London, Paris, New York, or Rio.

Having decided that this was the place for us (at least until our money should run out), Jimmie and I had bought ourselves a pleasant house, constructed in the year 1572 and therefore considered a bit too new and glittering and not quite in keeping with the rest of the neighbourhood, which still showed decided influence of its Gothic origin.

Soon afterwards Frits also made up his mind to join the small band of the truly wise ones who, having inspected all other Elysian premises from Tahiti to Bermuda, had come to the conclusion that Veere was the only

completely satisfactory answer to the question: "Where can a civilized human being spend his days with the least possible minimum of irritation and the greatest possible maximum of inner satisfaction?"

And in this way commenced that very brief period of absolute contentment during which both Frits and I probably learned more about ourselves and our fellow-men than we had done in all the schools, academies, and universities we had graced with our physical attendance if not always with our intellectual and spiritual presence.

Now it so happened (another fortunate coincidence) that neither Frits nor I was really very seriously addicted to any kind of physical exercise, although we agreed that it was a good thing for most other people, and as a result we used to sit for hours at a time in his small parlour with the high window (light is at a premium in that foggy part of the Low Countries) and we used to indulge in that pastime, which has never quite ceased to surprise the excellent Jimmie, who, like all true Americans, never ceases to wonder what possible pleasure two people may consciously derive from just sitting and talking—doing nothing at all but just sitting and talking.

That, however, was all we wanted. We wanted to sit and talk God out of His heaven and the devil back into his hell. We found delight in juggling with the solar system, and we used to turn the Milky Way into a bowling alley down which we rolled Betelgeuse to see how many signs of the Zodiac (which we used as our pins) we could knock down with one single ball.

And there was not a name in the whole card-catalogue of the past which we did not feel at liberty to take out of its little drawer and put aside for special examination; and then (the crime of crimes of all good librarians!) if we did not really feel that it belonged in that collection of the great and near-great we were just as apt as not to tear it up and throw it into the harbour and good riddance!

And now I want to tell you about a certain morning—it was during the Christmas holidays—when I had dropped in on Frits for an eleven o'clock cup of coffee. We were sitting in front of the window of his dining-room and we looked at the town-hall tower opposite us and we talked of some people Jimmie and I had invited for dinner that evening and Frits said, "What a pity we can't ask that old tower some day to drop in for a plate of pea-soup! It has been there such a long time; it has seen so much! It ought to be able to tell us lots of amusing things about all sorts of people it would have been fun to meet."

"Listen, my dear Frits," I answered, "why are you and Lucie and all the rest of us in Veere? Because there really is no longer such a place. It only exists in our imagination—it is 'memory turned flesh.' We have



grown sick and tired of a life of gadgets and tangibles and activities that were a waste of effort and we had come to hate all the rest of our beloved modern civilization which made us yawn and reach for a bottle of beer. And so we came here, for since there is nothing concrete in Veere, we can deal with facts."

"A most noble speech," Frits said, "but what does that have to do with my idea that it would be nice to have the tower drop in for dinner and tell us about all sorts of people we should have liked to meet?"

Here it was my turn to interrupt. "Why go in for the second best," I asked, "when we can have first best and at no greater expense of effort or money? If we can make a Gothic tower come and sit down at your dining-room table it must be just as easy to invite some Babylonian potentate who has been in his grave these last fifty centuries!"

Frits agreed. "There is something to what you say."

"Well," I suggested, "suppose we go ahead and do it! There is nobody to tell us no." And then and there we began to work on a general list of the people we would have liked to meet and whom we now intended to invite.

This took us quite a long time. Not because there was a lack of suitable candidates, but what were to be the qualifications according to which we would proceed in asking them to our dinner-parties? At first we were very serious about it, and we began to divide mankind into different categories, the good ones and the evil ones and those who had said yea unto life and those who had said nay and those who had liked boiled mutton (very few, we were delighted to discover) and those who had hated boiled mutton. Until one day Frits said to me, "I am afraid we are on the wrong track. It seems a hopeless task to try and divide the human race into definite categories. They are all of them such hopeless mixtures of good and bad and indifferent. Suppose we drop all our philosophic considerations and ask those whom we would like to meet and for no other reason than that, for the moment at least, we happen to feel that it would be interesting to find out what they looked like and what they had to say."

This seemed an eminently intelligent decision, and it was so decided.

Next we had to choose the day of the week on which it would be most convenient to have our parties. Frits, who did not have to take business very seriously (it was during the happy days when anybody could make all the money he wanted by going through the motions of running an office), thought that he could almost always drive from Amsterdam to Veere late Friday night or take the Saturday-morning mail train to Flushing. And so the dinners were set for Saturday evenings at seven, for we kept early hours in our little village.

Next came the question of what to give our guests for dinner. After

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## CHAPTER I

### DESIDERIUS ERASMUS, Our First Guest, Arrives Punctually on Time and Gives Us a Most Delightful Evening

WE had been promised that our plan would work, but when we found out how simple it was going to be, both Frits and I were a bit perplexed and we looked at each other and said, "This is almost too good to be true!" and we crossed our fingers and held our breath, and we decided to wait and see how our next party would come off before we committed ourselves definitely.

Our negotiations had been rather complex, but after we had made it quite clear what we intended to do and that we meant to be very, very discreet, we had experienced no further difficulties and had never even been asked for any kind of guarantee that we would live up to our promises. We had merely let it be known that from our side everything would be done "decently and in order"—for in the beginning of our discussions we instinctively stuck to a sort of semi-Biblical vernacular and we used to rack our brains for odds and ends of long-forgotten texts whenever we approached what was to remain the Great Mystery. And in addition, we most solemnly promised that, from our side, we would do everything to make our guests as comfortable as possible, and be at hand to make them feel thoroughly at home. We had given our word that we would not bother any of them with questions which might possibly embarrass them, no matter how curious we might feel about certain unrevealed secrets in their private lives, and that we would not delve too deeply into the hidden motives underlying some of their actions that never, as far as we were concerned, had quite made sense.

If they themselves should bring up such subjects, then we might make a few very discreet inquiries, but we must remember that most of our future companions had lived very strenuous existences and were apt to be people with rather sensitively balanced nervous systems. What they had suffered at the hands of their fellow-men had given most of them a desire to be allowed to spend the rest of eternity removed from all further contact with the human race, and there was to be no coercion in case they sent their regrets.

It was explained that a great many would be quite eager to accept our invitation. A short glimpse of the old familiar scenes might make them all the more resigned to their present mode of existence. But we must

it was the cloister called Steyn. It was situated near the city of Gouda, and Erasmus, all his livelong days, was to remember the spot with the same kind of cold-blooded detestation with which I myself remember the town of Ter Gouw, where I spent the four most miserable years of a by no means happy childhood.

But these monastic vows, once taken, had been final and definite and they had excluded the famous humanist from any kind of normal friendship with the feminine half of the human race. There are evidences that this was a source of great annoyance to him. Not because he was interested in women as such. But conscious of his brilliant powers as a conversationalist, he liked to enter into the normal social life of his day and he soon found that the Augustinian habit that he was forced to wear was hardly the right kind of introduction to a merry party. As a result, Erasmus, during the threescore and ten years he spent upon this earth, rarely came in direct contact with what we sometimes and quite irrationally call "the gentler sex."

But among the statues which adorned, and which even to-day (unless Mr Hitler has suddenly decided differently) continue to adorn the façade of Veere's ancient town hall, there is one of a certain Anna van Borselen. This charming lady (who was a *grande dame* in every respect of the word), had she not fallen in love with the wrong man and (infinitely worse) married him, might have become one of the great figures of history. She could (had she remained solvent) have qualified as the patroness of her unfortunate fellow-countryman, who, in spite of all his most persuasive begging letters, never quite achieved what could be called 'an established position in life' until he was much too old and much too famous to care either one way or the other.

My lady of Borselen's father, Wolferd van Borselen, had been the richest and most powerful nobleman of the province of Zeeland. He was lord of Flushing, lord of Veere, and owner of almost as many farms and estates as the abbots of Middelburg, who were the greatest capitalists of the whole of southern Holland. But Wolferd was a bad manager. Competition with the Burgundian dukes, who were just then establishing themselves in the southern Netherlands, had made him indulge in a too grandiose display of his own opulence. And when he died, Wolferd left his daughter a fine escutcheon with all the necessary quarterings, but not by any means as rich as she was supposed to be.

She fortunately understood her position, and when during her late twenties she was left a widow she decided to do the wise thing and retire to her estate on the island of Noord Beveland (opposite our own town of Veere) that she might devote herself to the education of her children and bring some semblance of order into the chaos of her private finances.

He was soon to be most sadly disappointed. That noble Latin poem which he had addressed to his benefactress and in which he had compared his Anna with Anna the sister of Queen Dido, with Anna the grandmother



THE LADY ANNA OF BORSELEN

of Jesus, and with Anna the mother of the prophet Samuel—it had been a complete waste of time, ink, effort, and parchment, for the Lady seemed to have had no idea who those famous namesakes might have been. She could read and write better than most of her female contemporaries, but she did not intend to become a bluestocking. And she remained completely aloof when the great humanist informed her that he intended to dedicate his *Adagia* to her little son Adolf, and merely asked: “What are adagia?”



slippery ice. There was only one way in which he could hope to reach his destination. He must go on foot.

As Erasmus wrote shortly afterwards to his friend Lord William Mountjoy:

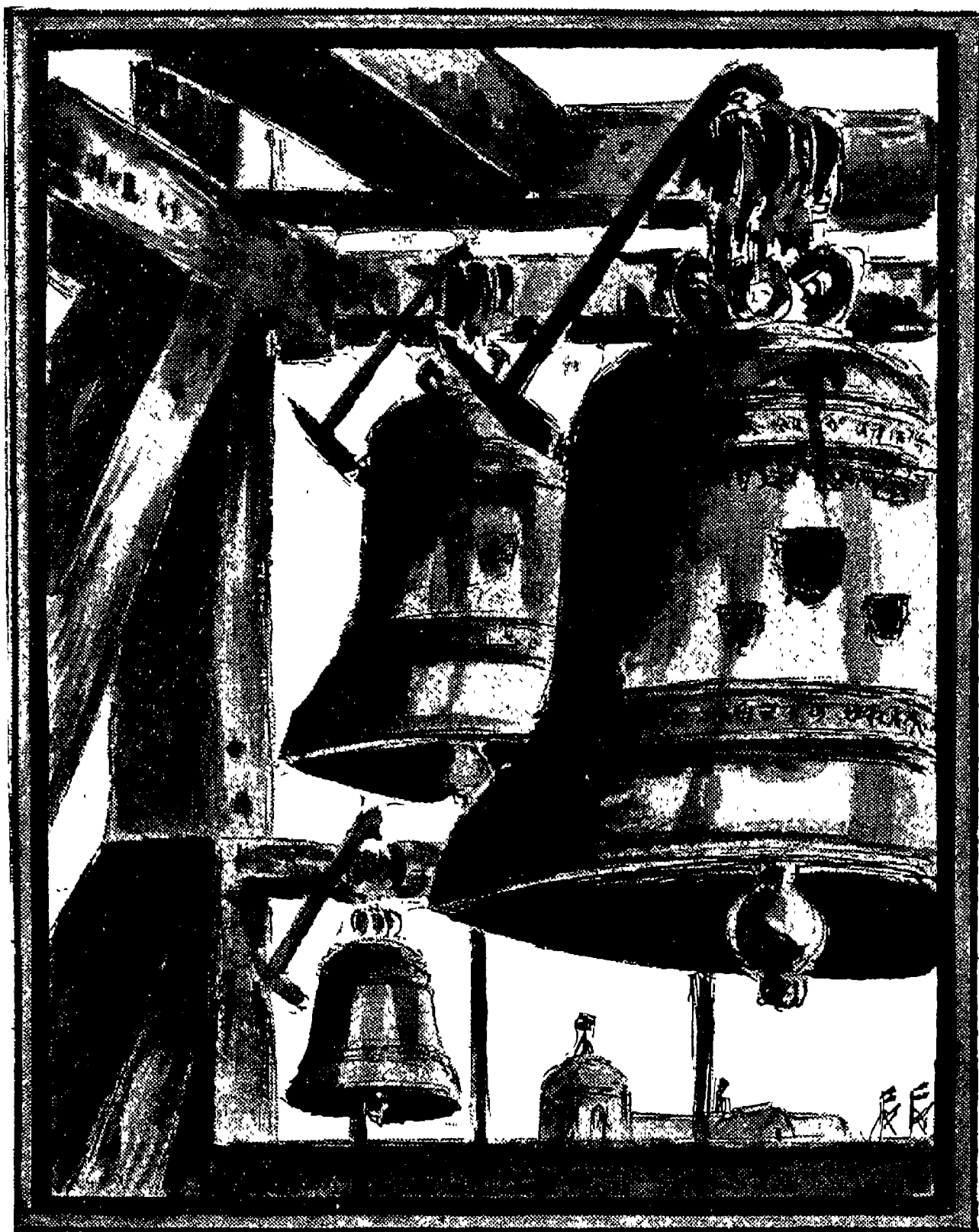
Behold us therefore, with Anna's castle right before our eyes but a sea of solid ice separating us from our destination. Such a terrific wind was blowing that two men from the other island, who had tried to come across to our shore that morning, had been forced to return. That, however, meant that we had this howling hurricane right in our own back. And so I crouched down on the dike and I slid across the ice and, as I had expected, the wind caught me and blew me right to my destination while I sat on my haunches and steered my course with the help of a long stick which served me as a rudder. Surely this was a novel kind of navigation!

That is a true account of my voyage—one long succession of miserable adventures—but what followed was an equally uninterrupted succession of pleasurable experiences.

In good health I reached the home of my Lady Anna of Veere. How shall I describe unto you the civility and the kindness and the generosity of this most noble woman? A more modest, more intelligent, and more charming creature than she surely never was born. Etc., etc.

Those flattering observations had of course been made before the true state of the lady's insolvency and her indifference about the real life of the mind had revealed themselves unto the eager pilgrim. However, the fact that Erasmus had actually been in Veere, that he must have spent some time there, living in the house of one of its merchants or artisans, that perhaps he had been struck with the loveliness of the town hall, then in the final stages of its construction—all these considerations had made us feel that Erasmus was the ideal person to be invited to our first, and therefore experimental, dinner-party.

And we had guessed right. For no sooner had the chimes of the tower, just across from Frits' house, begun to play the opening bars of Valerius' lovely old *Hymn of Thanksgiving* than we heard a commotion in the street. We hastened to the window and saw coming round the corner from the harbour a small, slightly bent old man, leaning heavily on a cane but marching with great assurance straight towards our front door. The strange-looking figure was followed by a tall and skinny fellow who undoubtedly must be his famous servant, his eternal famulus, and the noise we had heard was that of the wooden shoes belonging to a dozen or so little boys and girls who, attracted by this unfamiliar sight, had hastened to find out what queer folk the American and his friend from Amsterdam might, this time, have brought into their midst.



THE BELLS OF THE TOWN HALL USED TO TOLL THE HOUR  
OF DEPARTURE

were done, I am sure that our psychologists, carefully studying these tiny monsters, these misshapen proletarians and dwarfish devils, would be able to reveal certain angles of the Erasmian philosophy of life that have never yet been suspected.

But for that very reason we intended to avoid the entire subject of the graphic arts and instead we tried to imagine what kind of reaction we would obtain to the music we had selected. I remembered that Erasmus had never been as happy as when he was staying with his old friend, Sir Thomas More. England, incidentally, was the country he preferred above all others. He complained, of course (as who has not, these last four hundred years?) about the damp beds in the inns and the abominable food served to him everywhere except in a few private homes, but for the rest he adored this delightful country where young girls were in the habit of kissing the older gentlemen who frequented their parents' homes.

And in those days before the unfortunate advent of the Puritan England was indeed a merry country, and, in spite of its being ruled by a lecherous madman and in spite of the gallows which exposed their hideous burdens at many cross-roads, there was a genuine atmosphere of unaffected gaiety and good living and surprisingly high thinking which made itself manifest in every part of the land. That, of course, meant that there was a lot of music. Most of that music was of the amateur variety, for the Englishman, with his hard common sense, had never taken much interest in mere virtuosity.

We therefore had searched the gramophone catalogues for the seemingly simple songs which had been so popular in England during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and we had ordered records of Orlando Gibbons' *Ah, Dear Heart*, of John Bull's *The King's Hunt*, of Thomas Morley's *Go from My Window* and *It Was a Lover and His Lass*, of William Byrd's *The Bells* and of two of his motets, and Francis Pilkington's *Rest, Sweet Nymphs*. We played Henry Purcell's Chaconne when he came in and served William Byrd's Pavane and Galliards with the soup.

He seemed pleased and a little puzzled as to where the music came from. But we soon discovered that conversation was the old gentleman's real passion. He liked the music, but when it came to an end, he did not ask for more. And small wonder! He was a brilliant talker and he knew it, and he seemed like one starved for a bright and amusing exchange of ideas. Indeed, from some casual remark of his we rather came to the conclusion that while he was contented enough with his present status, he occasionally found the atmosphere just a little too solemn and oppressive and then wished that he might return to an existence slightly more—well, shall we say, slightly more active?—than that which he had enjoyed for the last four centuries.

Here it is, my report, as I had sent it to Frits' office in Amsterdam, three days before our meeting.

I first met Desiderius Erasmus when I was six years old. Every morning at half-past eight Hein, our old man of all work, used to take me sternly by the hand to guide me (or rather, to drag me) to school, for school in that terrifying old house on the river front, was not very amusing, whereas the streets and docks of Rotterdam were full of fascinating sights, sounds, and smells. And every morning I begged and implored old Hein to let me tarry before that graven image until the clock of St Lawrence struck the hour, for I had been told that when Erasmus heard the hour strike he would turn a leaf of the book he held in his left hand. And every morning old Hein would grab me a little more firmly and would pull me a little faster past this fascinating spot. Never did he explain what I only learned later—that there was a catch in this story, because Erasmus, being made of iron and not of ordinary flesh and blood, could not possibly hear the clock strike.

That is how I first got in touch with my famous fellow-townsmen, but who he had been or what he had ever done to deserve a statue in a country which was not very much addicted to honouring its famous men—that was something I never quite discovered until a great many years afterwards. And I doubt whether most of my fellow Rotterdammers were much better informed upon this subject than I. When they thought of Erasmus at all, they vaguely associated him with the Reformation, which was still an actuality to these pious folk, and they suspected that he had had something to do with the so-called "House of the Thousand Fears," which stood directly opposite his statue. In this ancient edifice, during the sack of Rotterdam by the Spanish troops, when all the Protestants had been murdered, a number of men and women had found a safe refuge because they had cleverly smeared the door and the windows of the building with the blood of a little pet goat. As a result, the mercenaries of King Philip, noticing these bloody crosses, had decided that the occupants of the house had already been 'attended to' and had gone their way, leaving the poor wretches shivering in the cellar and the attic until they were able to escape under the cover of darkness.

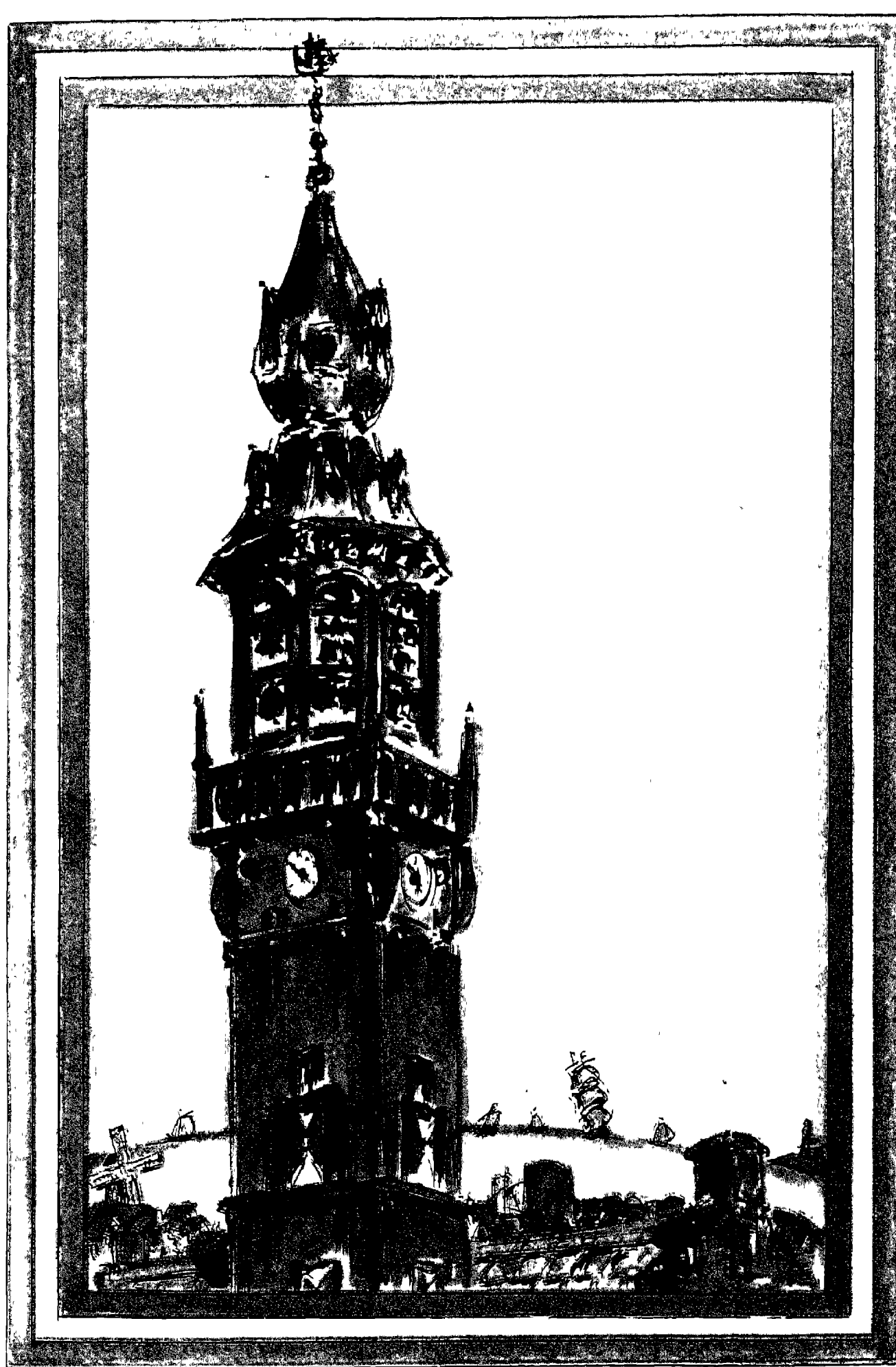
I remember that I always felt terribly sorry for that little goat which had been obliged to give its blood that others might live, and I too shared the belief that the iron man with the book in his hand had had something to do with that ghastly incident in our glorious struggle for freedom. Perhaps it was he himself who had cut the throat of that unfortunate little beast, although he looked quite amiable, had a long and amusing nose and a smiling mouth, and carried neither sword nor dagger nor any other instruments of violence.

that we had to suffer in silence, for when I was young the teacher was always right, and there was therefore no use bringing the matter to the attention of our parents. His teachers did not smoke. They did not come into the classroom with a grammar and a mark-book in one hand and three cigars in a paper bag in the other. Out of the grammar they would ask us their questions. In their little mark-books they would meticulously note down all our wrong answers, and they would smoke the three cigars while gloating happily over our helpless bewilderment.



It is not a pleasant picture I am drawing here of the days of my childhood in the old country. But it is an almost exact replica of the existence of little Desiderius, when he was a pupil in the school of the cloister Steyn. One day in Gouda I discovered that not far away from the city there still stood a farm which bore the name of Steyn and which was said to occupy the same site as the old cloister had done. The buildings were mostly gone, except for a few scraps of the original walls. Also, according to my information, there were a few chairs and desks left from the days of Erasmus, all of them in a sad state of repair.

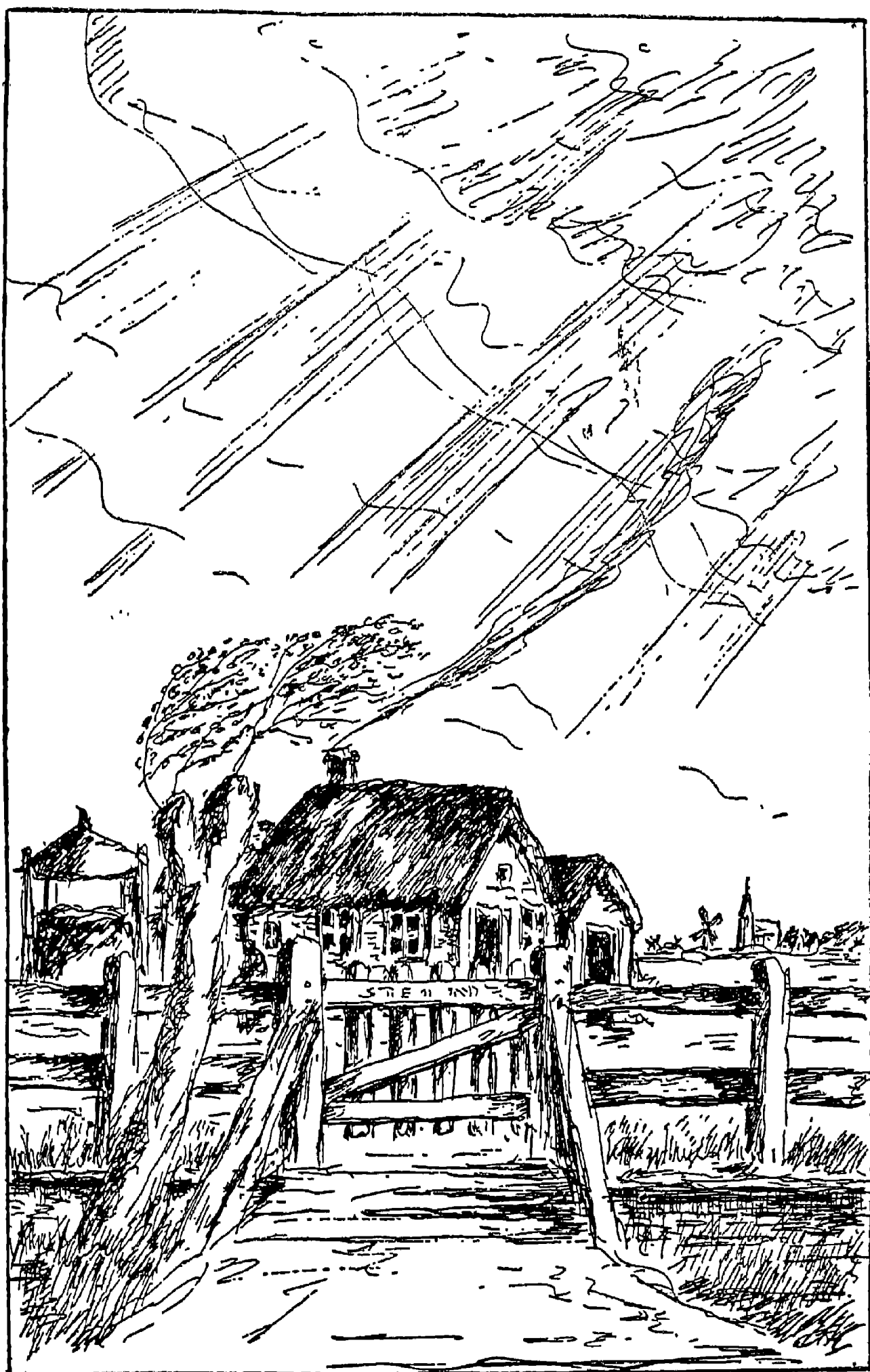
I decided to investigate. Wednesday and Saturday afternoons were my own. I was supposed to spend them playing football "to develop my physical health." I was not greatly interested in my physical health and I hated football. So I walked along the dikes of the river Ysel and felt that I had started upon quite an expedition.



THE TOWER OF THE ANCIENT TOWN HALL DOMINATED  
THE LANDSCAPE



ERASMUS WAS OUR FIRST GUEST



ALL THAT REMAINED OF THE OLD CLOISTER STEYN



Ages, when the Church and the world at large were so hopelessly intertwined and interwoven that it took nothing less than a full-fledged revolution (known afterwards as the Reformation) to untangle them.

If his father had been a regular priest (as is sometimes maintained), some slight sexual irregularities would hardly have attracted the public's attention, for in spite of the strict rules about celibacy, a great many of the priests of the fifteenth century lived in a semi-official state of concubinage. Those were the days when a cardinal (Alexander Borgia by name) could be known as the father of four children, yet be elected to the Papacy, and when the mendicant orders, which originally had done so much to regain the world for a purer form of Christianity, had long since degenerated into something far different from what they were intended to be. The noble ideals of St Francis and his fellow-reformers, who had worked so valiantly to bring the Church back to the days of an earlier and simpler form of Christianity, had long since been discarded as too hopelessly unpractical and impracticable for a world of common, ordinary human beings who knew on which side their bread was buttered and meant to get their share—with a little extra meat and cheese.

Quite naturally, those who took their faith seriously greatly objected to this state of affairs and loudly clamoured for reform and purification. Had they had their way, the Popes would have ceased to be the richest princes in Christendom, the bishops would have been obliged to eat dry bread instead of living on the fat of the land, and the village priests would have been restrained from letting their eyes rove a little too lustily among the womenfolk of their congregations, while all the thousand and one hangers-on of the Church, the lawyers and overseers and the tradesmen and even the Jews who dealt in the agricultural products of the cloisters, would have been deprived of those easy and comfortable revenues which they had come to regard as their due.

But all these highly necessary reforms did not come until Erasmus himself was well past the prime of life, and so the 'moral lapse' of poor Roger Gerard of Gouda (for that seems to have been the birthplace of Erasmus' father) was really not a matter of grave importance to anyone except the unfortunate issue of this irregular union—Desiderius himself and his elder brother Pieter, for whom Erasmus seems to have had a sincere affection and who shared many of his own miseries during the impressionable days of their common childhood.

We have never been able to reconstruct this period of Erasmus' life with any great degree of accuracy. Charles Reade went to considerable trouble and to far lengths to try and explain why Roger Gerard had not been able to marry the mother of his children. He was, of course, guessing. That is the good right of all novelists, whose duty it is to put their heroes

remote hamlet in Wyoming. But the world was very big in those days before the re-establishment of proper roads, and stories of the hopeless corruption and degradation of the Papal office did not travel across the Alps faster than any other news. The benighted people of the north therefore continued to take their Christianity in a spirit of such utter confidence and simplicity that they had long since become somewhat of a joke in the eyes of their more sophisticated Italian masters. That joke, however, was most carefully guarded within the walls of the Eternal City, for the faithful northerners, who actually believed every word their Saviour had uttered upon the subjects of honesty, charity, and poverty, were hard-working merchants and artisans who were not only willing but were actually eager to contribute to the utmost of their abilities towards the support and maintenance of their beloved Father in the City of the Seven Hills. It was a far wiser policy to humour them than to be humorous about them, for they suddenly might grow suspicious and pull tight the cords of their well-filled leather purses. At times one even had to close a discreet eye when they went so far as to proclaim that the word of Christ had more weight with them than that of any mere man and that, in case of a conflict between the two, they intended to stand upon the side of Christ rather than upon that of his representative on earth.

This desire on the part of the Church authorities not to kill the geese that laid the golden eggs probably accounts for many of the successful experiments that the northerners as practising Christians were allowed to make.

In Italy the followers of St Francis, who also believed in sharing all wealth, were to discover, even while their master was still alive, that such a doctrine was far from popular at headquarters and might even lead to death at the hands of the executioner. But beyond the Alps there was a chance for the development of many things that would have been a matter of grave concern had they happened a little closer to the centre of authority. That is why it had been possible for entirely new kinds of semi-clerical organizations of a suspiciously communistic brand not only to gain great popularity among the masses of people of the Low Countries, but also to maintain themselves for well-nigh three hundred years.

In saying this, I realize that communism was nothing new inside the body of the Church. All monastic orders were based upon those collectivist principles which had caused so much concern among the more respectable Romans of the second and third centuries, when the words Christian and communist had been practically identical. But these experiments in sharing both wealth and poverty had been comparatively harmless, for they had remained restricted to the small space of ground that lay inside the high walls of the monastic retreats. And a monk, as all the

was so practical that it worked. The Bishop of Utrecht, Groot's immediate superior, understood this so well that he immediately raised a cry of heresy.

That holy man (from his own angle) was entirely right. The latter half of the fourteenth century with its widespread economic discontent was hardly the time to inform the people at large that among the original Christians there had been neither rich nor poor, that all of the faithful had then shared equally such wealth as was at the disposal of their congregations, and that such a happy state of affairs could be brought back again to this earth if only the faithful would listen to the words of Geert Groot, the popular preacher who was travelling up and down the land, preaching and explaining his ideas to all those who cared to listen.

The Black Death, which raged throughout the life of Geert Groot and which in less than twenty years destroyed almost two-thirds of the entire population of both Asia and Europe, had also played havoc with that fairly equal distribution of wealth which had been typical of the earlier part of the Middle Ages. Quite unexpectedly it had made the few survivors very rich, while it had caused such a scarcity of labour that the honest farm-hand, now having the employment market practically at his mercy, could ask for the most preposterous wages (often as much as three halfpence a day) and could join the survivors of this holocaust in their absurd display of "ostentatious wealth," which in the end made them wear silver bells on their shoes and hats just to show that they could afford this deplorable waste of ready cash.

In England the cloisters (and who in that pious age did not think of insuring his future blessedness with at least some small gift to the keepers of his soul?) were as full of uninvestable funds as our own banks were during the first few years of our recent depression. They did not know it—those haughty abbots who were so sure of themselves and their position in the world—but it was the presence of all that gold in their vaults which a century later would provoke Henry VIII to make his far-reaching raids upon their accumulated treasures, that he might use this welcome plunder to enrich himself and his own henchmen. And therefore, as the good Bishop of Utrecht rightly argued, it was not exactly the most welcome moment for a prophet of a "direct and aggressive Christianity" to appear among the multitudes and to ask them, in a language so simple that even the humblest of spirit could understand him, what it would avail a man if he had all things but had not the true love of Christ in his heart.

The eloquence of the Middle Ages is very much like its music. It no longer appeals to us, for we are accustomed to something a little less simple. But when we take the trouble to read these sermons of that courageous Carthusian, Brother Groot, we still feel what a profound

not answered at all really answer themselves in a most efficient way, and Geert Groot was allowed to twiddle his thumbs (but in silence) until he grew tired of waiting and decided to pay a visit to the monastery of Groenendael, not far from the village of Waterloo, in Flanders, where there lived one Jan van Ruysbroeck, as curious a character as you will find anywhere within the realm of the Middle Ages.

Ruysbroeck was the perfect mystic on a Flemish basis of piety and common sense—of prayer mixed with soap. Not that anyone born in 1293 can have been exposed to a great deal of soap, even if, like Ruysbroeck, he lived to be almost ninety years old. But whereas the Oriental or Mediterranean mystic was very apt to develop into an unappetizing anchorite, spending his days and nights on the top of a pillar or hidden in a cave, his Flemish counterpart remembered First Corinthians xiv, 40, and, even when he withdrew from the world, continued to insist that all things pertaining to his daily existence be done decently and in order. Therefore, there was an almost complete absence of the more revolting kind of sainthood in the Low Countries at a time when even an otherwise sensible person like Francis of Assisi could be guilty of such nauseating acts of self-abasement that the more sober-minded folk from the north were repelled rather than attracted and never quite got over a feeling of abhorrence and of a rather futile waste of time and energy.

I have already told you that the cloister in which Erasmus spent the greater part of his childhood days had been no paradise. The monks had been recruited from the peasantry of the immediate neighbourhood, and the institution was only too often used as a harbour of refuge for those farmers' sons who were either too weak or too indolent or too stupid to make good field hands. But at least a few of the amenities of life had been observed, and those survivals of medieval days—the Beguines of Flanders and Holland—show us that, with the exception of an occasional backslider (I vaguely remember a saintly female from the town of Schiedam—of all places!—who was reputed not to have washed or changed her clothes for more than forty years!), the majority of those men and women, no matter how completely they had lost themselves in mystical speculations, never quite forgot that they also owed certain duties to a body supposedly created after God's own image.

The same held good of the ideas of those northern mystics. I shudder every time I look at the picture of Ignatius of Loyola. There is a cruelty in those eyes and in that mouth which I fear almost as much as the sneering contempt which is the most noticeable characteristic of the physiognomy of Adolf Hitler. Had I lived four hundred years ago, I would as instinctively have fought Loyola as I now am fighting the Führer. Don't ask me to explain why a mere mouth or a pair of eyes should cause an

he had found greatly to his liking. "Yes," he answered, "just once. In Paris while I was at college. I could not help it. A young woman, quite fair-looking, but her hair was all ablaze and she was shrieking hideously in the midst of the flames. I shall never forget it."

Silence again. Then: "They accused me, after I broke with Luther, of being a coward, of having made and kept my peace with the Church from fear of being myself burned at the stake. Perhaps they were right, for I never could forget that woman with her hair ablaze—a red halo of flames—and so I just did whatever I could to bring about the necessary reforms, but in my own way."

But I was talking of Geert Groot, and I must not wander too far afield. This is what Geert Groot did after his visit to his friend Ruysbroeck in Groenendael. It was very typical of both the man and the society in which he lived. He humbly obeyed his Bishop and the Holy See, went back to his native city of Deventer, and there founded that curious religious community which was to become known as the Society of the Brothers of the Common Life.

Headquarters were established in the house that Groot's lifelong friend, Florentius Radewyn, had donated for the purpose. Then he let it be known that all men and women who wished to withdraw from the world without actually taking monastic vows would, by moving into this new communal house and sharing each other's existence, be allowed to live the kind of life that was supposed to have been practised by Christian communities of the first four centuries after the death of the Master. The fourth chapter of the Acts of the Apostles was the model after which he intended to organize this community of true Christians. The Brethren of the Common Life, although they retained full civil liberties and could go back to their old mode of living any time they desired, promised that while they were members of Groot's establishment they would practise obedience and charity, humility and self-denial and piety, and furthermore that they would give up all hope of personal gain and would put their worldly possessions and their future earnings into one common treasury.

That was a sufficiently startling point of departure in an age of such crass materialism, but the Brethren went even farther with their experiments in applied democracy. They elected their own head, their own rector, and this personage did not have to be a priest. That, however, did not indicate a desire on their part to break away from the Church, for the Brethren of the Common Life were most obedient and loyal children of the Church and they were careful to see to it that in every one of their houses there should be at least two priests and a number of minor clerics.

their letters, if they were considered bright enough to acquire the art of reading and writing. It controlled their morals and sometimes actually undertook to give them a rudimentary conception of manners, but as most priests were recruited from among the lower ranks of society this was not done so very successfully.

In short, every living creature (except the beasts of the fields, which, being without immortal souls, were never an object of the Church's immediate interest) was at practically every moment of his existence reminded of the fact that he was not merely a citizen of such and such a village or such and such a country, but first of all an inseparable part of the vast super-state which by divine ordinance could lay claim to everything a mere mortal called his own—his house, his horses and cows, his wife, his children, and his life and soul.

To defy this power was closely akin to defying Almighty God Himself, and to do so took an amount of courage for which we have no exact equivalent in our present age. I realize that during the last four hundred years many nations have successfully rebelled against oppression and tyranny. A handful of colonists along the western shore of the Atlantic declared themselves independent of Great Britain. A few hundred thousand Dutchmen successfully defied a king who ruled over half the world. Less than a century ago the Italians threw off their Austrian yoke, and the Swiss had done the same thing five hundred years before.

Those rebels, however, while undoubtedly they took serious risks, knew that they could suffer only a certain amount of physical harm. They might lose their homes, their goods and chattels, their wives and children. But the ability of their enemies to inflict sorrow or pain ceased this side of the grave. It did not reach beyond the cemetery, whereas the Church had a lien on eternity and could influence man's happiness even in the hereafter. And that was a terrible fate to contemplate in an age when people were certain of the existence of an actual hell, full of hideous devils with horns and long black tails and with pigs' snouts that exhaled clouds of stinking vapours, all of them gleefully engaged in pitching unrepentant sinners from vast kettles of boiling pitch into equally generous cauldrons of molten brimstone.

These images mean nothing to us because we have never seen people being cooked alive in hot tar or being roasted alive on a pyre of fresh green wood. Few of us have even seen people being hanged or shot. But such scenes were only too familiar to the people of the Middle Ages, who, every time they left or entered a city, were forced to pass underneath a gallows on which the strangled bodies of some of their fellow-men were swaying slowly in the breeze, while on near-by wheels the vultures were gorging themselves on the remnants of other human beings, recently

I don't know whether (after the fashion of Mr Kipps and all ambitious young men who some day hope to make a success of life in a practical world) Erasmus ever noted down a list of his future ambitions. The people of the early Renaissance were not quite as self-conscious as we are. Being more interested in God than in themselves, they were not for ever analysing their chances of salvation, as we modern hypochondriacs watch the vitamins we consume with our morning's breakfast food.

But quite unconsciously, Erasmus throughout his life endeavoured to play the rôle of the Gentleman of the Goose Quill, as Franz Liszt, three hundred years later, would try to become the Gentleman at the Keyboard. The fact that he had started life under a cloud, that as an illegitimate child he had been forced to atone for a sin he had never committed, may have been the driving force of all his ambitions. For it is a well-known fact, clearly demonstrated by history (though only rarely stressed by our moralists), that most people who have achieved great things in this world have done so because they wanted to avenge themselves for the way in which, at one time or another in their careers, they had been treated by God or man.

Napoleon, the son of an out-at-the-elbows Corsican gentleman, a funny-looking little pip-squeak and the butt of endless jokes on the part of his classmates at the military school of Brienne, cannot rest until he is the son-in-law of the Emperor of Austria. Robespierre, the child of a good-for-nothing father, unattractive, halitotic, and awkward to such a degree that no woman will ever look at him twice, can find no rest until he has destroyed that society of fine-looking ladies and gentlemen who have humiliated him in the days of his youth. Mohammed, the man of God from Mecca, finding that his fellow-townsmen refuse to listen to him, hastens to the rival city of Medina and shows the Meccans what they missed when they failed to take him seriously. Adolf Hitler, a fifth-rate artist and a most unattractive personality, told by all his teachers that he would never amount to anything, is just now setting the whole world on fire to prove (to his own, if to no one else's, satisfaction) that he is really a great man and was not properly understood when he was compelled to live in Vienna's doss-houses and get his meals from a soup-kitchen maintained by a charitable Austrian Jew.

I could write a book upon the subject. Some day I may do so, and I shall call it *The Inferiority Complex as a Motive of Success*. Of course, this inferiority complex can work in more ways than one. In the case of truly inferior characters it will provoke them into acts of cruelty and malevolence and inhumanity. In the case of superior characters it may lead to manifestations of great benevolence, kindness, and deep

job, and when an English friend offered him a chance to go to the University of Paris, he eagerly accepted. His funds, however, were negligible, and he was obliged to enroll among the charity students at one of the colleges. There he had a dreadful time, almost starved to death, never was sufficiently warm, and contracted a contagious disease which was to make the rest of his days miserable. But he learned what he wanted to learn. He improved his Latin style and got a thorough training in the Scriptures. He felt that clearing up the very corrupt text of many of the holy books (and the translation of the Bible by St Jerome was then more than eleven hundred years old) would be the best mode of attack if he wanted to make an outstanding name for himself in the field of literature.

However, in order to perform this task thoroughly, Erasmus had first of all to learn Greek, and the next six years of his life were spent in an effort to find a competent Greek teacher.

It may at first strike us as somewhat curious that there was such a dearth of good Greek professors. But that was only natural. Originally, the Greek teachers had been Byzantine refugees who had seen the handwriting on the wall and had escaped from Constantinople while the roads towards the west were still open. When Erasmus appeared upon the scene, that generation of fugitives from Turkish violence, to whom Greek had been an actual and living tongue, had died out before they had had time to train a sufficient number of successors. Hence, there was such a scarcity of first-rate Greek preceptors that the few who could qualify for the better-paid positions were in great demand. The rich English universities could offer higher salaries than the French and Italian ones. And as scholarship as well as art has always tended to follow the full dinner pail, it was in England that Erasmus hoped to find what he was looking for.

Erasmus hated the sea, but there was no choice, and as soon as an obliging English patron appeared to subsidize his stay at Oxford, he crossed the Channel and took horse for that famous city on the Isis. This was the first of several visits to England, during which Erasmus gradually rose from a mere student to the rank of full professor, for a dozen years later, the former Oxford pupil was called to teach at Cambridge, where he then finished his epoch-making labours on the New Testament. And somehow or other, English life seemed to suit him better than that of his own country or of France. Indeed, he never seems to have gone back to his native land unless he was taken sick, which happened quite often, but even then, he complained about its barbaric customs and manners.

It may strike us as curious that this highly outspoken and often very caustic commentator upon life in general never came in contact with the



the human race," so he argued, "insists upon being completely crazy—since everybody from the Pope down to the humblest of village priests—from the richest of men to the most miserable of paupers—from the fine lady in her silks and satins down to the slut in her calico dressing-gown—since the whole world has firmly set its heart against using its God-given brain but insists upon letting itself be entirely guided by its greed, its vanity, and its ignorance, why in the name of a reasonable Deity should the few truly intelligent people waste so much of their time and their effort in trying to change the human race into something it never wanted to be?

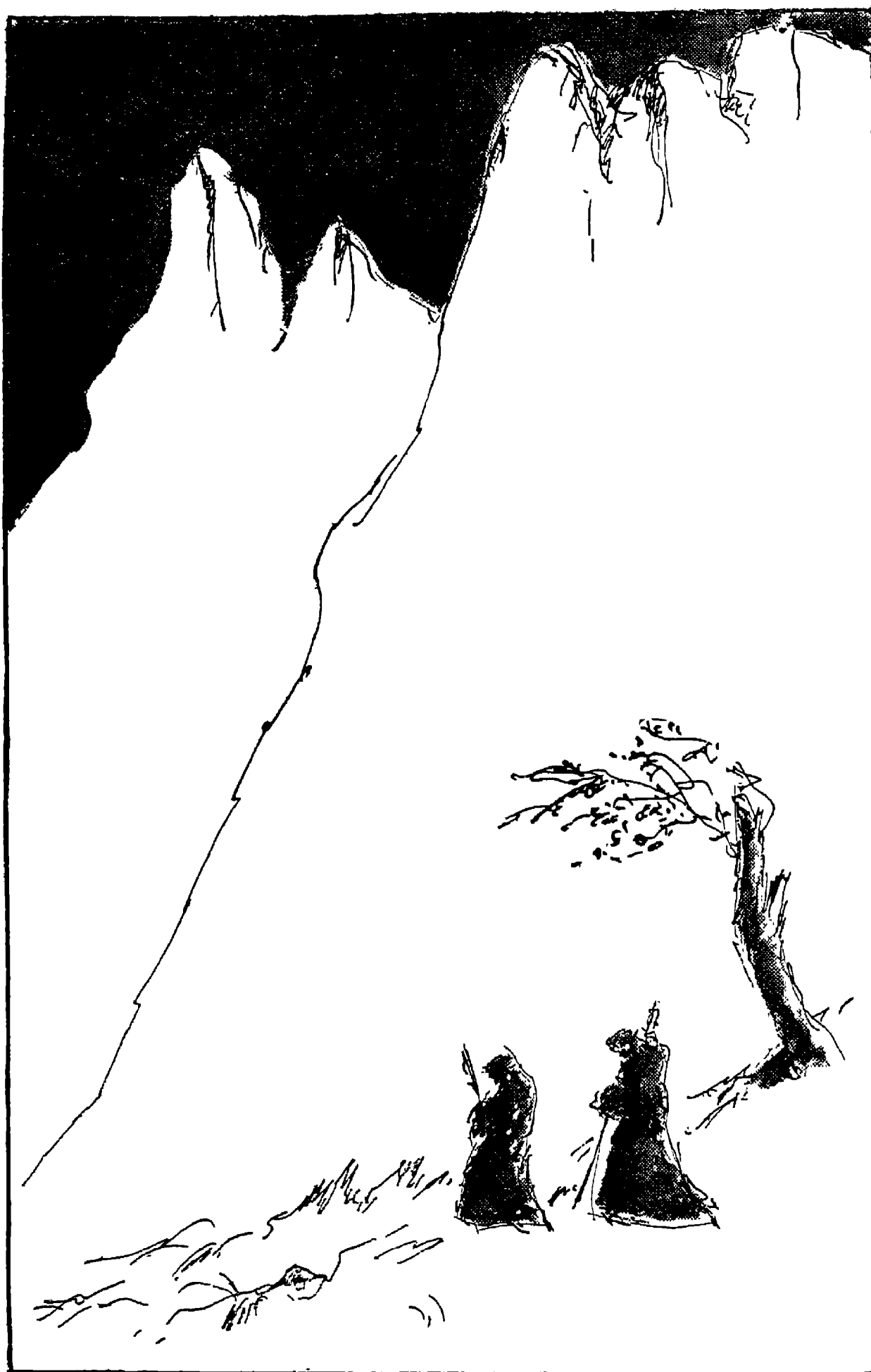
"Let them be happy in their follies," he boldly proclaimed. "Don't deprive them of that which gives them more satisfaction than anything else—their sovereign power to make fools of themselves."

This was the only direct broadside Erasmus ever fired at the hopeless conditions into which Europe was plunged by a Church which was unable to reform itself from the inside and by the men who were equally unable to reform it from the outside. He laboured at his self-imposed task of "a reasonable revolution" during all the rest of his days, but he had no taste for martyrdom, and he therefore refrained from frontal attacks and did his best to corrupt the garrisons which occupied the citadels of his enemies, and in this laudable effort he was eminently successful.

He wanted to make himself the champion of tolerance, but as he was born in an age that had neither newspapers nor magazines, his activities as a publicist had to be highly original.

Erasmus, like all true ironists, was a master of innuendo and hidden meanings. So he published respectable-looking collections of Greek proverbs and equally harmless-looking volumes of conversations, but in every one of these books he concealed a number of offhand commentaries upon the affairs of the day which undoubtedly would have brought him into conflict with the authorities if only they had been bright enough to read between the lines. But not unlike those Austrian police-officers of a century or so ago who failed to hear the strains of the forbidden *Marseillaise* in Schumann's *Faschingschwank aus Wien*, the censors approved of everything this famous cleric wrote and did not in the least understand that those seemingly innocent assortments of popular Greek proverbs contained dynamite enough to blow all of them sky-high the moment enough people should have got hold of these little chunks of the truth and had learned to use them for their own explosive activities.

Even in Rome, nobody seemed to have suspected that this long-nosed Dutchman with the dangerous twinkle in his eyes was something more than just a very bright Augustinian monk who happened to write an



THE ROAD TOWARDS ROME WAS LONG AND DIFFICULT

city had been ruled over by its bishops, but, with the return of trade during the fourteenth century, the authority of these churchmen had waned considerably. The rich burghers, with their well-filled strong-boxes, grew conscious of their power and resented having to take orders from outsiders. They had turned Basel into a stronghold of the New Dispensation—of those forces which were no longer willing to submit to the will of Rome.

Finally, in the year 1501, the sovereign city of Basel had joined the Swiss Confederation, that ancient and curious experiment in self-government in the very heart of Europe, which has outlived almost all of its neighbours as an independent nation. And as soon as Luther had posted his declaration of defiance on the doors of the court church in Wittenberg, the honest Basellers had sent their bishops a-packing and had joined the Reformation. From that moment on they intended to be masters of their own fate.

A printing press, then as now, was an indispensable part of any revolutionary movement, and the Basellers were delighted when one of their Bavarian neighbours, and a very famous publisher, decided to make their city his permanent home. Like so many of the leading craftsmen of the golden age of the book, Johannes Froben had originally prepared himself for a professional career, but, like Aldus, he had given up the writing of books for the pleasure of printing them. It was he who in 1516 had put through the press Erasmus' revised and corrected Greek Testament, the book which, incidentally, was used by Luther when he spent his voluntary confinement in the Wartburg, translating the Bible into the German vernacular.

Froben was not only a most excellent printer, but he was also a first-rate business-man. Like Alice, he asked, "What is the use of a book without pictures?" and he had persuaded Hans Holbein to leave his native Augsburg and settle down in Basel, where he could offer him permanent employment as an illustrator. In the year 1521, after endless years of wandering, Erasmus, who was beginning to feel the burden of his years (he was only fifty-five, but that was pretty old for a man of the sixteenth century), now decided to make his permanent home in this ancient Swiss city. And in order not to lose any valuable time, he moved right into his publisher's home. With the exception of a few years spent in the near-by city of Freiburg (a move made on account of his health) he was to remain in Basel until the day of his death—July 12, 1536.

The amount of work Erasmus achieved during this period was stupendous. How a man constantly plagued by so many afflictions—both real and imagined—could find the opportunity to do all the things he did is quite a puzzle to us moderns who have all the time-saving devices at our

Froben presses. He tried every form of literary approach. He was in constant epistolary contact with all the most important people of his time, and with them he discussed every subject between heaven and hell, but mostly those connected with their common efforts to save the world from any further outbreaks of religious violence.

The liberty and dignity of the human soul meant more to Erasmus than all those religious arguments which (whether they were offered by the followers of Luther or the other side) had but one single purpose—the continued enslavement of the spirit. And he clearly foresaw that the triumph of the Protestant cause would merely substitute the rule of a Book for that of a Man—that is to say, the Pope—and in that case he felt that the Man would be preferable. One could at least argue with the Man, but one could not argue with the Book. So why change from one system to another when there was really nothing to be gained and much perhaps to be lost? Why not try to reform the Man and the system he represented rather than discard him and make the road free for the advent of a score of little men, each with his own version of the truth and each trying to do, on the scale of a small German principality, what the Pope had failed to do on the scale of the whole civilized world?

What Erasmus failed to understand was this: once an ordinary human being, like an over-abused horse, has taken the bit into his teeth, he is no longer able to listen to reason, but he will run his course until he is stopped by either his own exhaustion or an act of brute force from the outside. Some day, when we shall know a lot more about the inner workings of the human mind than we do to-day, we may learn to handle the situation, and then we may be able to prevent whole nations from running amok. But that can only be accomplished after we have substituted professional psychologists for professional politicians. And the latter know on which side their bread is buttered and that they are totally unfit for any other kind of job that guarantees them such lavish rewards for so small a display of talent and effort. These politicians will try and prevent such a change with their very last breaths. They will even denounce a serious scientific investigation of this problem as a dangerous revolutionary effort meant to upset the 'existing order of things.' And since in this respect the first half of the sixteenth century was exactly like the first half of the twentieth, Erasmus ere he died must have realized that though he had indicated the road we should follow, there were powerful forces at work which intended to prevent people from doing just that. His last years cannot have been very happy. On all sides there was unrest. There were quarrels and fights, and a general outbreak of war was only prevented by a system of compromises which satisfied no one and only increased the general feeling of suspicion and distrust. Soon there would be an incident, for invariably,

when everybody goes around armed to the teeth, a gun is somewhere apt to go off by itself, and the first shot leads to a salvo, and a wholesale massacre then becomes almost unavoidable. Erasmus departed this life before that point had been reached, but already there was so much strife that he—the most peaceful of men—must have felt quite contented to call it a day and bid this world a final farewell.

Erasmus had one consolation. During his last years he had at last found that economic security for which he had so earnestly longed when he was still young. Pope Paul III had made him the nominal head of a deanery in the city of Deventer, where he had gone to school. And His Holiness, with his fine Italian hand (was he not a member of the famous old house of the Farnese?), who meant to save the Church by means of his diplomatic agility and not by brute force, now appealed to all those intellectuals who had remained loyal to their ancient mother and whose literary efforts might persuade the wandering children to come back into the fold. And the same pontiff, who employed Michelangelo to decorate the Sistine Chapel and who patronized and protected Ignatius of Loyola and his newly founded Society of Jesus, now tried to gain the good-will of Erasmus by offering him, as an out-and-out gift, those three thousand ducats which were necessary if a person aspired to be created a cardinal.

Erasmus, as always, went through the motions of being deeply grateful, but he respectfully declined. He must remain free. During the winter of 1535-6 he was confined to his room in his publisher's house. Soon afterwards he was unable to leave his bed, and on July 12 of the year 1536 he quietly dropped off into his last sleep.

Just before he died, his mind wandered back to the scenes of his childhood days. And this Dutchman, who, without knowing it, had presented the world with a philosophy of life as typical of his native land as rain or a love of neatness, but who had never written a single line in the language he had learned at his mother's knee, suddenly slipped back into the familiar tongue of his youth. Just before he ceased to breathe he was seen to smile and was heard to utter the words, "*Lieve God.*" The next moment he stood before his "dear God" to give an account of all those many years he had spent in His service. And then he may have discovered that he had been mistaken when, during his last years, he had so often complained of having merely wasted his time, for no word that has been uttered for the purpose of making man the master of his own fate has been spoken in vain.

The first of our dinners passed off very successfully. We found that we could easily understand our guest if he did not talk too rapidly. His

English and German and French were as antiquated as his Dutch, but it was no trouble at all to follow him in our native tongue, the words of which he pronounced with a decidedly Flemish accent, or at least so it seemed to us. After about ten minutes, the conversation was in full swing. It covered every subject under the sun, from such modern inventions as radio and aeroplanes (in which, by the way, he showed very little interest, being doubtful of their ability to make people much happier) to the threat of Bolshevism, Fascism, and Hitlerism, which these last years had become a subject of grave concern to all of us. He had never heard of them before, but his quick mind easily grasped the situation.

"The Italian," he said, "as you describe him to me, bears a very close resemblance to the Colleoni of my own day and to all those other soldiers of fortune who infested Italy when I visited there. In every city—even in Rome—I found that the old free form of government had disappeared, or what they used to call their 'free form of government,' which was often enough a very unpleasant sort of demagoguery—an irresponsible rule by the masters of the guilds and the working-men's corporation. When I was in Italy every village, every hamlet, had a little tyrant of its own. I met quite a number of them. Most of them were a very crude type of citizen of low origin and even lower taste. Often they had not even been born in the cities over which they ruled, being strong-armed peasants who had made a name for themselves as the leaders of some band of professional cut-throats. Few of them could write their own name, though they loved to pose as the protectors of the arts, and several of them tried to persuade me to stay with them, though they had never read a single one of my books. They apparently thought I was some kind of foreign version of their own *Mirandola*, though I am sure I never laid any claim to be considered a paragon of good looks and social elegance.

"Others got me confused with another young man—I think his name was Aretino—who was just then beginning to make a name for himself as a writer of blackmail poetry, though of course he did not call it by that name. In the end, I used to carry copies of my Greek New Testament with me and send them those with my compliments as soon as I reached their territory, so that there would be no mistake as to the sort of work I did. Taking them by and large, they were a miserable pack of *lazzaroni*, and now their type seems to have spread all over the world. But they had better be on their guard, for *hoi kuboi Dios aei eupiptousi*, and they will go the way of all their kind."

Frits and I hastily looked at each other. Apparently the old gentleman, who for so many years had been a walking collection of proverbs, was quoting from his own works.

"Would you mind writing that down for us?" Frits asked. "It is Greek, isn't it? Perhaps we don't pronounce it to-day as you did four hundred years ago."

Erasmus reached for one of my sketching-pads. I offered him my fountain pen. "I would rather not use that," he said. "I am accustomed to a goose quill, but if you will kindly give me one of your pencils—they seem so much better than the ones we had—I will spell it out for you." And in his precise handwriting, which looked as if it had been printed, he wrote down, *οἱ κύβοι Διὸς ἀεὶ ἐνπίπτουσι*.

"There it is," he said, "and here is the translation. 'The dice of the gods are always loaded.'" And then, looking at me: "I thought you told me a little while ago that you had studied Greek?"

"Only six years," said Frits, who was a bright fellow. "Only seven years," I said, who had not been quite so bright and had been obliged to repeat one year.

"I don't quite understand that," Erasmus replied. "In my day we learned a language like Latin or Greek in about three years. Of course, we were not perfect. Our Greek especially was rather poor, and I am afraid that we wrote it as Luther wrote Latin, though they tell me that his German is most excellent. I don't know—I always hated that tongue—but then I was probably prejudiced. But tell me—for that greatly puzzles me—why did it take you so long to learn those languages?"

"Perhaps because we *had* to learn them. You, my dear Doctor, learned Greek because you *wanted* to."

"Of course I did! It was the only way I could ever hope to do some really good work on the New Testament."

"Yes," said Frits, "and after you got through with your New Testament, you went on reading Greek, while we never looked at another line of it as soon as we had left school."

"Why not?"

"Because there are so many other things to read besides Latin and Greek, and to us those other things seem much more interesting."

"Yes," Erasmus answered, helping himself to another piece of that chocolate for which by this time he had developed quite a passion. "I hear that to-day even in English and Dutch there are books now that are worth studying. In my day it was different. There was a volume by a certain Chaucer which my dear friend, Sir Thomas, was for ever urging me to read. I tried it once or twice, but it rather bored me. So I stuck to my old Romans."

"And to Homer?" asked Frits.

"Yes," Erasmus answered. "But I could never find a text that quite

satisfied me. Now, so they tell me, the texts are perfect, but y longer bother to read them! This is a curious world. First we spe lives trying to get something. Then we get it, but we no longer v I am afraid that we shall always remain like children, and children are savages."

This remark was neither particularly brilliant nor very new. But getting late, and, as both of us noticed, Erasmus was really a v gentleman and he was getting tired. After dinner I had offered glass of an excellent but rather over-syrupy Tokay. But I knew t people of the Middle Ages had had a much sweeter tooth than v and I had felt that I could take the risk. He had tasted it and had ex his sincere approval. "*Vinum bonum laetificat cor hominis*," he h quoting from the Hundred and Fourth Psalm. A few minutes quietly dozed off. Apparently he was no longer accustomed to su fare. I beckoned to Frits, and we slipped out of our chairs and s on a bench in front of the fire.

"Well," I said, "the plan worked, didn't it?"

"Yes," he answered, "but I still can't quite believe it. And i frightens me. For what shall we do next? To tell you the trut rather lost."

"I have thought of that too," I answered, "but I have had Suppose we ask the old gentleman over there to be our guide, phil and friend, so to speak! He will know much better than we wh and he can help us out with our other guests."

"That's a splendid idea," said Frits, "and perhaps he would little vacation, for he seems a bit bored with his present existen remember the other day in the town hall, when the town treasurer us that big Gothic room with the high ceiling, and so full of li told us that it was going to pieces because they had no use for it? we fix it up for him as some kind of study? I'm sure he would We could furnish it so that it would look like his old work Cambridge or Basel. We have a great many Dürer drawings ar ductions. Lucie would help us. She is marvellous at that sort Suppose you suggest it to him when he wakes up?"

"Suppose you do?"

"Suppose we both do?"

And so, as soon as Erasmus woke up (he was only indulging cat-nap) we very carefully approached him on the subject. A seemed greatly surprised and rather bewildered at our offer. talking it over from every possible angle, he said that nothing wou him more than to come back to earth for a while.

"Of course," he warned us, "you must remember that it is



"How about the neighbours? Will they be cooking all day long?"

"Well, of course, they will have to feed their families, but we'll ask them to be very careful."

Erasmus looked at us with an apologetic smile. "You must think that I am terribly fussy," he said, "but there is one thing in this world I just can't stand. That is the smell of fish. I simply loathe fish! I'm afraid I had too much of it at the cloister Steyn. And ever since, the smell of fish, whether frying or boiling, makes me sick."

"We promise you on our word of honour there will be no smell of fish, either fried fish or boiled fish, if we have to put the whole of the village on a meat diet."

"And one more item. You will be very careful about my wine? As you may know, I suffer from the stone, and therefore I have to be most careful. But I loved the Moselle you gave me to-night. I do not want to cause you any unnecessary expense, but I would sincerely be obliged to you if you could give me some light beverage like that, for water does not agree with me."

I hastened to assure him that we would attend to all those details. "How about a light Burgundy?" I asked him. "A Chevalier Montrachet or a Bâtard Montrachet?" I realized too late that that had not been the happiest word to use in the presence of a man who was so conscious of his illegitimate origin.

"The Chevalier Montrachet would be wonderful," he answered, stressing the "Chevalier." "Or some Goutte d'Or. I would be very grateful for some Goutte d'Or. And now," he said, wiping his clumsy, old-fashioned glasses, "I notice that it is very late, and I wonder whether you would let me hear some more of that music your little hidden orchestra played earlier in the evening?"

"Do you remember how the tune went?" I asked.

Erasmus hummed a few bars, and we recognized Orlando Gibbons. We found that we had several more of his records, and we first played *The Silver Swan* and next Thomas Morley's *Sing We and Chant It*.

During this last madrigal, the first notes of Valerius' *Hymn of Thanksgiving* played by the town-hall chimes began to trickle in through the closed blinds. Some familiar strain in this ancient hymn seemed to strike a reminiscent note in our guest's memory. His slender right hand, the hand bearing that well-known blue ring given him by his pupil, Alexander Stewart, and showing the picture of Dionysus, was slowly beating time, and he hummed the words of a song he must have remembered from his days at school. He seemed as happy as a child who has come home at

## CHAPTER II

### We Arrange a Room for ERASMUS in the Veere Town Hall and Entertain Our Next Two Guests,

WILLIAM THE SILENT and GENERAL

GEORGE WASHINGTON

F RITS left on Sunday evening, and I therefore asked Lucie van Dam and Jimmie to look after the business of fixing up that room in the old town hall where Erasmus meant to spend part of the holiday he so quaintly called his "sabbatical year." My wife could take care of the practical details and talk to the carpenter and the painter and the glazier, while Lucie, with her fine artistic sense, would recreate it into something resembling the old gentleman's familiar study in Cambridge. She used the pictures of both Hans Holbein (that of 1530) and of Albrecht Dürer (dated 1526), and at Bal's in Middelburg she even found a chair (late Gothic and pretty badly shopworn) that looked exactly like the chair in the woodcut an unknown Basel artist had engraved in the year 1530 and which showed Erasmus dictating to his secretary in his house at Freiburg.

In the meantime we had to make arrangements for the entertainment of our next guests. On Sunday morning we had decided whom we meant to ask. It seemed to us that we owed it to Veere to try and get a famous historical personage connected not only with the history of our own little city, but of the country at large. There was only one name that suggested itself to us.

William of Orange had not merely been Marquis of Veere, but more than that, he had been the Prince, for he was the man who had founded the Dutch nation and had sealed its independence with his own blood. But whom would we ask to meet him? The moment our first visitor had left us, Frits and I had come to the conclusion that if we meant to be really successful, we must always try to have at least two guests at the same time. It made for a more animated kind of conversation.

"But who," Frits asked, "is there who would fit in with our Prince?"

Suddenly I had an idea. "Look here," I told him, "I'm a sort of amphibious creature when it comes to nationality. Here in Zeeland everybody takes me for a perfectly good Hollander. Most of our neighbours hardly know that I have ever left the island. But in America, in spite of my accent, I am never thought of as anything else but American. The Prince gave me my original nationality. Why not invite the man responsible for my other country?"



THE INVITATIONS WERE DISCREETLY PLACED UNDERNEATH THE OLD  
STONE LION WHICH GUARDED THE ENTRANCE TO THE TOWN HALL

I am sure that I shall be very comfortable.' Now, what I want to know is this—how did he get in when he had no key?"

"My dear friend," I said, "we may have a few rather strange visitors here during the next few months. Please ask no questions, but just take them for granted. They will be quite harmless."

"I'm not afraid of spooks, but what I want to know is this. Is this old gentleman going to be a permanent resident of Veere, and if he is and has to pay taxes, where do I send the bill?"

"Send it to me," I told him, "and I will see to it that the village gets every farthing to which it is entitled."

"Fine—that's really all I wanted to know. Otherwise, I would get into trouble. For the rest I think all this is a wonderful idea. Veere always needed a few more tourists, and perhaps these visitors of yours will tell the folks at home, and they will come, too. Come to think of it, I had better lay in an extra stock of picture-postcards and cigars, and spruce up the barber's shop a little."

I urged him to do so. I could already see old Erasmus sending his friends 'at home' a picture-postcard of the town hall with an "X marks my room, wish you were here." St Peter, I am afraid, would have been somewhat puzzled.

This is a copy of the report about the Prince of Orange I had sent Frits by the last mail on Thursday. With most of the facts he would already be familiar. It was what the diplomats of the old school used to call an *aide-mémoire*—something to guide his memory.

It was the twenty-fifth of October of the year 1555. The place was Brussels. More than a thousand people had gathered together in the Hall of the Golden Fleece to bid their ruler farewell. They were delegates to the Estates of the seventeen different provinces which went to make up what was known as the Netherlands.

These counties and duchies and bishoprics had passed through many hands. For a while, the House of Bavaria had played quite a rôle in their affairs—a rôle which had given one particular princess, Jacqueline of Bavaria, a chance to distinguish herself as a woman of great determination, who might have come out on top if her career had not been so seriously interfered with by her sex. Like Mary of Scotland, she had married a succession of weak but handsome young men, and she had spent her last years drinking away her sorrows, a prisoner in a castle whose walls still arise in lonely grandeur amid the flat meadows of the old province of Holland.

Next there had been the House of Burgundy, during whose sway the



ERASMUS IN HIS NATIVE CITY OF ROTTERDAM



IN HIS NEW STUDY ERASMUS WAS AS HAPPY AS

these possessions would run less risk of possible confiscation if the son of the house were to be educated in Brussels as one of his *hostages*). And so this handsome and amiable young man had to Brussels, there to learn all that could be learned within the applied government, and there he had kept open house and money like water and incidentally had married some more money. Had he lived to-day, his name and his wife's would have appeared in the society columns of all the big dailies, and the sob sister would have thrilled over the cost and splendour of the dear Prince's entertainment in honour of the illustrious Principe degli Ambasciatori from the court of Milan, and the Sunday illustrations would have shown pictures of the wonderful whippets the couple valued on their estates near Breda.

That this idle young man of fashion would, within a few years, become the serious and highly competent leader of an almost desperate struggle shows that there was more in him than had thus far appeared on his surface. As a matter of fact, a few of his contemporaries had become very much aware of his extraordinary gifts as a political scene-shifter. The viceregal court at Brussels was a centre of intrigue, and there were by far too many foreign hangers-on to please the native element. Both the Dutch and the Flemings coveted the lucrative posts for their own children and they hated to see the provinces go to the hands of Spaniards or Frenchmen.

William, on the other hand, on account of his holdings in the Low Countries, was considered a Dutchman, and, as he had more common sense and polish and business acumen than most nobles (who very rarely rose above the mediocre cultural level of the squire), his colleagues were quite willing to let him look after their interests. Meanwhile they could continue to live quietly in the country, hunt all day long, drink beer or wine all night long, lay bets, bear-baiting, and quarrel in a most unseemly manner for the amusement of the heiresses whose marriage to one of their loutish sons might ease and lift at least part of their uncomfortable burden of loans and taxes.

That was the way the stage was set when the Emperor Charles and the Spanish and Italian fortune-hunters at court soon found that most of the opposition to their plans (for they, too, wanted titles and jobs) came from the side of this well-mannered but tight-fisted German. And they sarcastically dubbed him the "silent one" who wasted no needless words, who worked in silence, but who got what he wanted.

Actually, William was not at all a silent person. He was

In the end Alva had to give up. Having, like all of Philip's most faithful servants, been obliged to maintain his armies on credit (Philip never paid anybody if he could possibly help himself), he had got himself so hopelessly into debt that he was obliged to escape from Brussels in the middle of the night, lest in the morning he be arrested by his outraged creditors and dragged before a civil court, for in this damnable land of tradesmen and artisans, the civil courts functioned even in the midst of war.

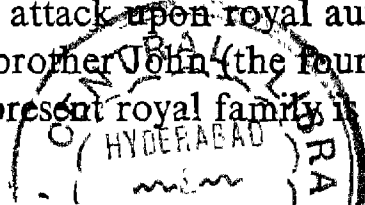
After this first failure Philip tried a new approach. This time he sent a Man of Peace and Moderation. At least outwardly so, for at heart Philip never changed in his attitude towards the enemies of the True Faith. Every one of the new proposals of the rebels was listened to with polite attention. Then the same stony silence. "Will the hated foreigners be recalled and will King Philip please deal with his Dutch subjects through the regular established channels of the courts and refrain from forcing the Inquisition upon an unwilling people who are accustomed to freedom of thought?"

Upon the first of these two points, the King in far-away Madrid (always half a year behind with his correspondence) pretended to be willing to compromise. But heresy, he insisted, must be stamped out once and for all, and if the Netherlanders were either unwilling or unable to return to the bosom of the Church of their own volition, the King intended to give the Inquisition a free hand.

The people of the Low Countries, conscious of their economic strength, replied by sabotaging all the royal taxes, and without money the regent could hire no soldiers. Soon conditions grew so bad that no Spaniard was safe unless he went about with an armed guard. And all this cleverly organized opposition, as the King knew and as his sister knew, was the work of just one person—that little German princeling who, without support from abroad, had regularly checkmated His Most Catholic Majesty on every point.

Philip, like a good Spaniard, then bethought himself of another effective way to rid the world of this obstinate enemy. A price was put upon the head of the Prince. There were quite a number of candidates for this generous sum of blood-money, for it was known that in this case Philip intended to pay with a certified cheque. Fortunately for the cause of the Hollanders, the assassins were either caught before they had had a chance to pull their triggers or they fumbled the job, and the Prince recovered from his wounds. In the end, he was even able to strike a counter-blow so staggering in its effects upon the established order of things that the whole world was to feel the recoil of his attack upon royal authority.

Already in the year 1579 the Prince's brother John (the founder of that line of Orange-Nassau from whom the present royal family is descended)





even after these many centuries, and I am sure that Thomas Jefferson, in his most eloquent moments, could not have done better. And I have always rather wondered how familiar Sam Adams of Boston was with this document when in 1743 he qualified for his master's degree at Havard with a thesis entitled: *Whether it be Lawful to resist the Supreme Magistrate if the Commonwealth cannot otherwise be preserved*. I rather think he knew about it. It also seems certain that Thomas Jefferson, as well as most of the other men connected with the American Declaration of Independence, had read it. Why it is so little known in the America of to-day and is so rarely mentioned in our school-books, which carefully stress Magna Charta, is somewhat of a mystery, but the Dutch Act of Abjuration of the year 1581 is well worth our attention as 'source material' for the Declaration of Independence of almost two centuries later.

The author, having delivered himself of a short historical review of the events of the previous thirty years, thereupon, and in the most formal of terms, declared that, in view of his many acts against the constitutional privileges of the different provinces, the King of Spain had now *ipso jure* forfeited his rights to the sovereignty over the people of the Netherlands and that therefore these subjects were now set free of their former oath of allegiance.

And so the deed had been done, and the world gasped, as well it might. For here, and for the first time in modern history, one of the Lord's anointed—a sovereign by the grace of God—had been thrown out on his ear, so to speak, and had been sent packing like an incompetent and dishonest servant. Not even his baggage had been sent after him, for the revenues of these rich provinces now went directly to the Estates-General. And they, as representatives of the people, spent it hiring those armies and equipping those navies with which they intended to attack their former liege lord in every part of the globe and by means of which they were to ruin his dynasty until the last members of it were glad to find employment as automobile salesmen in modern New York.

Philip now was out of the way, and William, by his shrewd sense of politics and by his instinctive feeling for what he could induce his fellow-citizens to do and what he had better leave alone, had won. His position as the generally recognized leader of the forces that were working for independence had by now been so firmly established that he was the logical candidate for the vacancy. Alas, the petty jealousies among the political leaders of the different provinces (a breed that never learns anything!), as well as the inherent respect for 'legitimate authority' so typical of the people of that era, still made the Estates-General hesitate and forced them to look once more for a ruler of the blood royal. They

After this almost disastrous attempt upon his life, the Prince had deemed it wise to leave Antwerp and move to Delft. The city of Delft, although small, was the most heavily fortified town of the province of Holland. Not only could it be defended easily, but strangers within its gates would easily attract attention and could then be asked to explain exactly why they had come to this particular spot and whether they had any right to be where they were.

It was early in the month of July of the year 1584. During the last few days, a stranger had been observed hanging around the former monastery that had been converted into a home for the Prince and his family. He had, of course, been detained and had been strictly interrogated. But he had offered an entirely acceptable excuse for his presence. His name, so he said, was Balthazar Gérard, and he was a Frenchman, the only surviving son of a family massacred during an anti-Calvinistic riot in his native city.

This plausible story he had learned by heart from a Jesuit priest in Trier, who at Easter had not only confessed him but had at the same time absolved him of the sin he was so soon afterwards to commit and which, in the eyes of his spiritual adviser, would not be a sin but a highly virtuous act and one deserving of every honest Christian's praise.

Monsieur Gérard must have been an excellent actor, for the Prince's court preacher, who examined him in the matter of the Calvinistic faith, had only good things to report and felt absolutely convinced that the shabby-looking visitor was indeed the unfortunate victim of Papist fury. As for the reason for his living in Delft, he reported that Gérard had been asked to proceed to Delft by the Prince's own representatives in Paris that he might enlighten His Highness about the last hours of the Prince's great and good friend, the Duke of Anjou, who had recently succumbed to that tuberculosis which was so sadly prevalent among his mother's people, the members of the House of Medici.

The story fitted in all respects, and the supposed messenger deceived the Dutch officials so cunningly that he was allowed to visit the Prince in his bedroom and there give him all the details about Anjou's last hours. As a matter of fact, he knew nothing about those last hours, but neither did anybody else, and who was to tell him that he was a liar?

On July 8 the young man was once more discovered roaming through the hallways of the Prince's residence. Asked what he might be doing there at so early an hour, he answered that he was on his way to the church where the Prince was supposed to attend services that morning. As that church happened to stand across the canal from the Prince's home, this explanation was accepted without further ado. But why, some curious person suggested, hadn't he come in through the front door?



THE PRINCE WAS COMING DOWN THE STAIRS. THE MURDERER WAS STILL WAITING FOR HIS CHANCE

for the subsequent events in the Netherlands, there had been no one else who had enjoyed such universal esteem as the Prince, and the moment he was gone, the old provincial rivalries once more broke forth in all their old fury and, though all official documents of the Dutch Republic of that era stressed the fact that "In union alone lies our strength," the rich merchants, who were thereupon entrusted with the care of the nation, were much too jealous of each other to overcome their mutual ill-will and to work wholeheartedly for their common cause.

And so the United Netherlands went the way of all democracies. As time went by, it degenerated into a debating society in which the controlling interests grabbed whatever they could for themselves, leaving the public weal to the devil. On such occasions, the devil is never very far away and is always most ready to oblige.

And now a few words about General George Washington, but so much has been written about him that I can be very short.

Within the realm of geology it sometimes happens that one layer of rock will push itself across another layer, and then it takes an expert to determine exactly what has taken place. The same holds good for history. Not infrequently it occurs that some particular cultural or economic or social layer shifts from one part of the world to another, but as a rule this takes place so quietly and so gradually that hardly anybody notices the change. Then the denuded soil at home develops a new civilization entirely different from the old one, but that too comes about so slowly that it attracts few people's attention, until the fatal day when the people wake up to a realization that, though nominally they still speak the same language, are still loyal to the same flag, and are still supposed to worship the same God, they have no longer anything in common with each other. After that the more they try to explain themselves and their motives to their former neighbours, the less they succeed in doing so.

Take our own case. We are only beginning to suspect what happened during the seventeenth century in regard to the old England and the new one. The peace which had finally made an end to the great Lutheran-Catholic controversy had decreed that every prince should have the right to decide what form of religious worship his subjects must accept. That, of course, had been one of those "compromises of desperation" which are the result of an intolerable situation. Europe could not possibly survive if the people continued to destroy each other on account of their religious convictions. Any kind of arrangement, guaranteeing at least a momentary respite from the everlasting slaughter, was better than a continuation of the war, and the disastrous principle of "whose rule I accept, his God I also worship" was greeted as a very clever solution, worthy

in the British capital, there came a change over the land that led to that half a century of constant friction which in turn was to lay the foundations for the free and independent United States of America. Those elements in England's life which foresaw what was coming despite the difficulties of maintaining the liberties and prerogatives they needed in order to function properly and happily and, as there seemed to be no chance of getting rid of their imported Scots monarchs, they began to look for another place of abode where they might continue to live their own kind of lives without being constantly exposed to a visit from the local tyrant and a polite invitation to hie themselves to the Tower, there to await His Majesty's pleasure and (most likely) his executioner.

When an exasperated nation at last grew tired of their rulers and wanted for Dutch William to put their house in order, there seemed to be a chance that all would now be well. Unfortunately, headachy William could not even live as long as Oliver Cromwell, and a dozen years after his death the British crown fell into the hands of a minor German dynasty that was to spend two centuries in its adopted country before it finally shed its guttural Teutonic accent and could express itself more or less adequately in the tongue of William Shakespeare. From a merely political point of view, therefore, little was gained when the House of Hanover succeeded that of Stuart, and gradually there came about such a hopeless cleavage between the England of the Old World and that of the New that no war could decide the issue. That war became known as the American Revolution, and it gave Americans their own republic.

The ancestors of George Washington came from Northamptonshire. They moved to the New World in 1658, when George's great-grandfather bade farewell to England's white cliffs and settled down near West Creek, in Virginia. We know little about him, except that he chose to follow the sort of career he would have chosen in the Old World. He became a member of the Virginia House of Burgesses. He died leaving his meagre estates to his son Lawrence.

Lawrence's second son, Augustine, having been born on the western shore of the ocean, felt more at home among his new surroundings than his father had done. He caught the spirit of the new country and saw more in running an iron mine and an iron smelter than in doing what his forefathers and members of his tribe had done. Thus far they had contented themselves with raising tobacco for the London market—a rather hazardous business as it placed them completely at the mercies of their British agent.

Digging iron out of the soil was, of course, not quite as genteel a profession as supervising lazy and unwilling Negro slaves, but it was more profitable, and after he had returned from his schooling in England Augustine had settled down near Fredericksburg and in due

"Old Grog" won everlasting detestation in the British navy by ordering that the sailors should not get their rum neat but mixed with water so that they should not be incapacitated quite as much of the time as they used to be, when the stuff was poured raw down their throats.

This expedition against Cartagena had not accomplished much towards making England mistress of the Caribbean (through no fault of Vernon's, but because of the incompetence of most of his colleagues), but out of it had grown that friendship between Lawrence Washington and his commander-in-chief which made Lawrence change the name of Little Hunting Creek plantation to Mount Vernon.

As I just said, Lawrence died in 1752. He left Mount Vernon to his widow, Anne Fairfax, who within the same year married into the Lee family. She sold the estate to her brother-in-law George, who, then at the age of thirty, began that career of a sound marriage and shrewd investments which eventually was to make him one of the richest young men of Virginia.

But in the meantime, George had done several other things which were to prepare him still further for the rôle he would soon afterwards be called upon to play.

In the year 1753 Governor Dinwiddie had appointed him a major and had sent him into the wild West with orders to find the commander of the French forces, who, after an overland voyage from Canada, had occupied the greater part of the Ohio Valley. Major Washington was to remind his French colleague that he was poaching on British territory and to suggest that he should leave as soon as possible.

Whether on this occasion Washington was guided by his own woodcraft, by divine Providence, or by his interpreter, Jacob Vanbraam, I could not tell you, but Washington did find the man he was looking for and delivered his message. The Frenchman courteously invited him to dinner in a fort which is now the town of Waterford, in Pennsylvania, but added that for the present, at least, he and his French troops intended to remain where they were.

This refusal on the part of the French to withdraw their forces led to skirmishes, and these skirmishes in turn led to war. During this conflict Washington, badly supported by the undisciplined colonial troops, was taken prisoner by the French and was only released after he had signed a promise that the British would not try to build any other fortifications in the Ohio Valley for at least a year.

After the failure of their irregular troops, the London authorities hoped to have better luck with their regulars. In February 1755 General Edward Braddock arrived in Virginia. Washington, like most of the other native officers, had withdrawn from army life. The reason for such a

been born and to partake of all the fashionable pleasures of that day, such as dancing, hunting, riding, drinking, and going to Sunday service in the nearest Episcopal church.

But, as most of us six-footers know only too well, women, being what they are, prefer the little fellows whom they can pick up when they fall and hurt themselves and whom they can carry away in their arms and fondle until they smile again and are able to say, "I am feeling much better, and now I will go and pluck you a daisy."

George Washington was no daisy-plucker. A young man who before his twenty-fourth year had gone through a couple of wilderness campaigns, who had fought in half a dozen battles, and who had experienced a great deal of sickness was apt to be a rather serious person, and that, of course, did not help him very much either while trying to win the favour of some Virginian belle. Finally, in sheer exasperation he decided to be practical rather than romantic, and he married the widow of a fellow-planter, one Colonel Daniel Parke Custis. Martha Dandridge Custis was the mother of two children and the owner of fifteen thousand acres of land near Williamsburg, sixty-five thousand dollars in cash in the bank, and one hundred and fifty slaves. Martha Custis also was (and was to prove herself even more so in the years to come) a very kind-hearted and understanding companion, an excellent housekeeper, and a discreet and faithful wife to a man who was to occupy the highest position in the land. Best of all (the only real consideration in such matters), she gave her husband everything he most cared for. She provided him with a well-run home, where at any time he could entertain all the friends he wanted to bring, and she saved him from all those fussy details which are so exasperating to a man who has got a real job to do.

Fifteen years after their marriage, George Washington came at last into his own. For he was given the task of reorganizing the new England on the American side of the ocean into a nation that would be able to take over when the older England overseas should have failed.

The rest is history. It has been told so often and so well that I shall not waste your time repeating what all of us know. In England no one connected with the Government seemed to have grasped the fact that the crown was dealing with a people who were the spiritual descendants of those Englishmen who, a century and a half before, had already rid themselves of one head bearing a crown. There is a story current in many parts of New England of how, during a threatened Indian massacre, there suddenly appeared an old, white-haired fellow, coming from nowhere in particular but wearing an outmoded Cromwellian uniform and wearily but efficiently swinging an old Cromwellian sword with which

the evidence is available, we can sum him up in a very few words, for there really was nothing very complicated about this greatest of all Americans.

George Washington was not a great military leader. He was careful and methodical, but he lacked the genius of an Alexander or a Napoleon. He was not a creative statesman like Jefferson, and old Ben Franklin was his undisputed master when it came to diplomatic negotiations that required shrewdness and patience and a gift for negotiating. As an orator he was deplorably lacking in all those tricks by which an experienced speaker can sway his audiences. Nor did he ever indulge in what we would now call original and creative thinking. He was by nature a conservative and deeply distrusted the bright boys who tried to sell him the ideal of the French Revolution. Indeed, if he had had his way, all radicals would have been sent back right away to where they had come from. They upset his notions about a well-regulated commonwealth in which every man, woman, child, horse, and dog should know his, or her, or its place in society. He wanted freedom, but it was the freedom that had prevailed in the England of his ancestors. The conception of liberty which was to arise soon afterwards among the disinherited masses of the future republic he did not understand at all, and it is doubtful whether it would have been very much to his liking.

Yet it was he who founded the republic; it was this Virginian planter who set America free from foreign domination; it was this Southern aristocrat who started off the noble experiment in self-government, and he was able to do this because he was far ahead of his contemporaries in that one particular respect which counts more heavily in the scales of the gods than all other qualifications for glory and success put together.

George Washington was the embodiment of character.

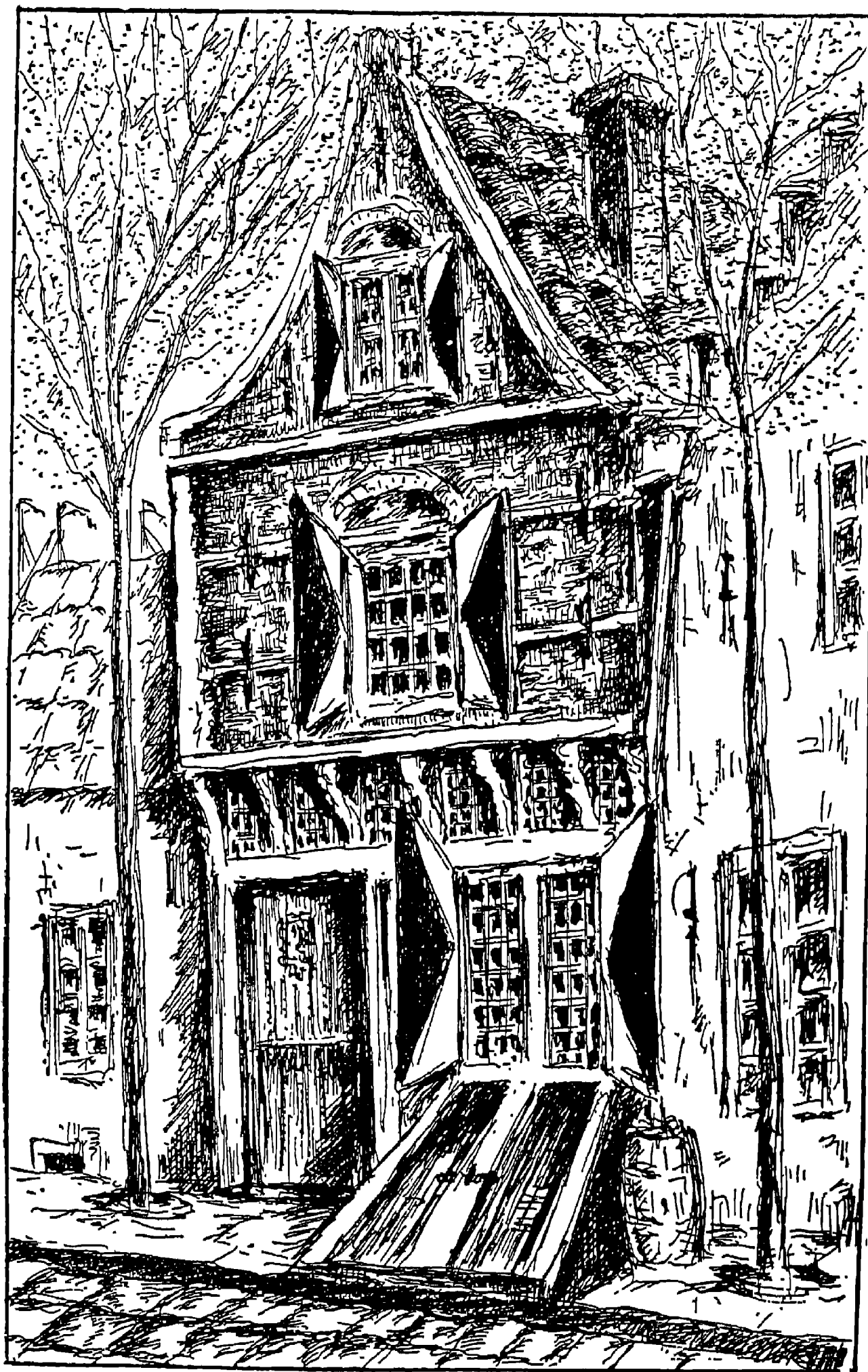
Webster defines character as follows: "Highly developed or strongly marked moral qualities; individuality, esp. as distinguished by moral excellence; moral vigour or firmness, esp. as acquired through self-discipline; inhibitory control of one's instinctive impulses. . . ."

I think that I can let it go at that. For my final comment upon both William of Orange and George Washington need consist of but one single word: CHARACTER.

As soon as I had finished these short biographical notes, I put a special-delivery stamp on the envelope and walked to the post-office to mail it to Frits in Amsterdam. But on the way home, I remembered that we had done nothing as yet about our music. So I went back to my desk and got up a little programme that I thought would be suitable for the occasion.

The Prince was easy, but I felt a little uncertain about the sort of tunes that would appeal to George Washington. Since he had lived in the same





FRITS' HOUSE IN VEFRE'S MARKET-PLACE

had married a daughter of James I of Scotland, and, as a wedding present, an arrangement had been made by which all Scottish wool could be imported free of charge into the Netherlands, provided that it came in by way of Veere. This had brought quite a large Scots colony to the little city, and everything had gone along in fine shape until the collapse of the Netherlands during the second half of the eighteenth century.

I showed the General the old house in which the headquarters of the Scots staple had been established and the dormitories and dining-room of the visiting skippers and business men. I told him of the strict regulations for those visitors, who were not allowed to carry the steaks they had bought at the butcher's home on the point of their swords, for that sort of thing was not done in a respectable Dutch city. They had to take them home in a bundle underneath their arms.

And next to the Scots' House I pointed to the house called the Ostrich, because there was a large stone with the picture of an ostrich in the façade. That is to say, people had always called it an ostrich until a professor, who knew all about birds, had happened to come to Veere and had exclaimed, "Lord help us all if that is not a picture of a dodo!" And it was—the only image of a dodo probably ever made from an original model, brought home by a Veere sailor and done by the not very experienced hand of the local stone-cutter, but a dodo nevertheless. Curiously enough, no one had noticed it until that bird professor visited us.

This greatly interested the General, for he too had wondered what had become of the dodo, and he said we ought to know a lot about it in Holland because the Dutch were the first to have settled down on the island of Mauritius. But when I asked him, hadn't he noticed that pioneers never had the slightest interest in their physical surroundings, he said yes, and it was perfectly deplorable, but when immigrants from Europe settled in the wilderness, they had apparently only one idea—to destroy and hack and maim and in general to kill off every living creature that came within reach of their guns. He had a theory about it. It might have been because in the Old World these people never had had guns, had not been allowed by the Government to have guns. Then, when they came to a part of the world where they were left to their own devices and where the laws against firearms could not be enforced and where there was no danger of being hanged for the dreadful sin of poaching, their newly found sense of liberty had gone to their heads and they had indulged in those frenzies of killing which in America had developed into a serious menace to all wild-animal life. He himself had often observed this while surveying in Virginia and Pennsylvania, and he had often expressed the fear that eventually such a course might lead to the complete extermination of all sorts of useful and interesting birds and mammals.





GENERAL WASHINGTON WAS LEANING WITH ONE HAND ON ONE  
OF OUR OLD CANNON

would only do business with us when we were able to pay them in English gold. Just like the farmers in Jersey who would not sell us anything unless we paid them in English money. And where were we to get hold of sovereigns unless we first took them away from the English, and how could we take them away from the redcoats unless we had money with which to buy guns?"

That was about the longest speech the General made that evening, and it greatly surprised us, though we were delighted to notice that all we had heard about the General's eloquent use of the English language had been true. Indeed, he swore like a trooper and seemed totally unconscious of the impression this might make upon people who had been brought up on the fairy-tales of Parson Weems. But perhaps he felt that he was among friends and could let himself go. Hence, out of decent respect for public opinion, I am giving a slightly censored version of his actual utterances.

After his outburst, the General dropped into a profound silence (the turkey had been served in the meantime), and it was then the turn of the Prince. He seemed to feel quite as deeply upon the subject as the General had done.

"Yes," he said, "I too feel that if I had never left that old castle of Dillenburg where I was born, I probably would have been a great deal happier. I even might have lived a few years longer. And what I received in return—I don't know. I really don't know—but what I got, was it worth all the endless suffering and the endless troubles of that hopeless fight? I was not really much of a military man. I hated to be thrown in with those dirty, hairy Swiss mercenaries I had to hire and who were for ever asking for money I did not have to give. The stench of their camps and their bodies is still in my nostrils. They were either drunk or plundering. And when they were not paid on the dot, they would go wild and burn down a couple of villages or they would run away and hire out to the enemy.

"And then I had to deal with those Calvinist preachers, for ever ranting and canting, quarrelling among themselves and forcing themselves into my presence when I was busy with a dozen much more important things. And once I had let them come in, they had nothing better to do than tell me that the kingdom of God was now at hand and I must repent (repent of what?)—and then, and this is the actual truth, they would denounce me in my own house for the sin of not listening to them as the chosen vessels of God to save this wicked world from perdition.

"That was only half of the story. There was that everlasting problem of getting hold of enough money to pay my troops. Every one of those little cities that called on me to defend them was thinking only of its own



THE LIGHTS FLICKERED AND WENT OUT, AND OUR GUESTS  
HAD DISAPPEARED

### CHAPTER III

## SIR THOMAS MORE Is the Guest of His Old Friend DESIDERIUS ERASMUS

**F**RITS," I said when he came to our house for an American Sunday-morning breakfast—waffles and sausages and lots of coffee. "Listen, my good Frits, I have had an idea. You remember that Erasmus had a very dear friend, old Sir Thomas More?"

"Of course I remember him. If only from that sketch by Holbein, the pencil drawing showing the whole More tribe, one of the most delightful family portraits that were ever made. Didn't he lose his head? Didn't he get into some kind of scrape with Henry VIII? On account of the wives? Yes, I remember him very well."

"This is just an idea," I answered, "but our beloved Erasmus has been very kind to us. Now, suppose we arrange a little surprise party for him. Don't tell him who is coming, and then suddenly let him see who it is!"

"People don't like surprises," said Jimmie, giving Frits his third cup of coffee. Being a very methodical sort of person, she does not like surprises herself and feels convinced that all other people must share her prejudice.

"That goes for bookkeepers and public accountants, people who are not allowed to have any imagination," I hastened to reply, remembering Jimmie's pride in the fact that in all the many years of our marriage she had never been out one cent on her monthly bank statement, a talent for which I greatly envy her, "but men and women of a broad, humanistic culture love surprises."

"Is that so?" came from the good James. "Well, have it your own way, but I think you had better warn him just the same."

"That would spoil the fun."

"O.K.! Try it and let me know."

We both promised that we would let her know, and then, while Frits' waffles were being done, I went to my workshop and hastily jotted down a few notes about Sir Thomas.

Sir Thomas was born in 1478. He was decapitated in 1535. He studied at Oxford, where he became interested in literary studies—nothing very profound, just that enthusiasm for the New Learning which was then as fashionable as an interest in the New Economics is to-day. After school he went in for the law (you should have let the law alone, Thomas!) and showed such talent for that kind of work that he attracted the attention

Elizabeth Barton was a native of Kent. That is why, in the heyday of her fame, she became known as the Nun of Kent, or the Maid of Kent, which reminded the people (and how they loved all those goings-on at the court!) of the Maid of Orléans.

Like her French counterpart, Elizabeth was of exceedingly humble origins, a woman-of-all-work, an illiterate household slavey, to be exact.



SPRING WAS COMING TO OUR ISLAND

While working for the business manager of the Archbishop of Canterbury, she was taken ill. When she recovered she had gone completely crazy. She heard voices and saw spooks. Whenever she was in a trance she predicted the future—mostly blatant nonsense like the high-sounding quatrains of Nostradamus, the famous Franco-Judean soothsayer. But among the simple countryfolk it was soon being whispered about that she was a true prophetess and spoke with the voice of God. (Why, by the way, do all those voices of God invariably talk like ignorant peasants, and why are they so rarely able to write their own names?) But the humble



Cranmer, lately raised to be Archbishop of Canterbury, would be delighted to oblige. More than that, he would, as long as he was at it, make a thorough job of it. For here was a chance to rid the country of as many of his Majesty's enemies as could possibly be connected with this dastardly plot. What plot? Who knew or who cared? Just mention a plot against the life of a popular ruler, and the people will howl for somebody's blood—a lot of blood, if possible. For the common people deeply loved their bluff King Hal, whom they considered one of their own and who would just as soon sleep with a fishmonger's daughter as with an imperial princess (much rather). Therefore, let his executioners torture the wicked witch until she is ready to confess that she has stolen the towers of Westminster Abbey, and then let there be a fine party on Tyburn Hill, and let the crowd watch all these enemies of the royal authority being hanged and cut down before they are quite dead and then have their breasts cut off and their hearts pulled out of their bodies, and let the bodies themselves be hacked into four pieces and hung in iron crates above the city gates, until they shall have rotted away. Whoo-pee! And did the crowd enjoy itself that blustery day in April of the year 1534, when its happy dream came true!

Now, let us check up for a moment on the hangman's score during this period.

A.D. 1534—*exeunt Elizabeth Barton et al.*

Then suddenly, from unsavoury comedy to sublime tragedy: A.D. 1535—Sir Thomas More, first accused of having been a part of the great Bartonian plot against the King's life (read: for having refused to approve of the most scandalous of his Majesty's several divorce suits), and then actually refusing the Oath of Supremacy, is sent to the Tower and is beheaded on a charge of treason.

A.D. 1536—and the King takes his revenge upon his young wife. On the seventeenth of May of that year Anne Boleyn's alleged lovers are executed, and on the nineteenth of that same month Anne herself loses her lovely head. Her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, the presiding official of the court, weeping copious tears of the well-known crocodile variety, has offered his Majesty the choice between having the faithless wife decapitated or burned at the stake. The King has graciously declared in favour of the axe, but with great delicacy he has sent for the executioner of Calais, just across the Channel, to do the job, for once a gentleman, always a gentleman, and no British hands must be allowed to touch the blood of one who had shared the royal couch and who had given the King one living daughter and two dead children.

But why, you will ask, this rage and fury against Anne? Because she

government in that semi-serious little opus for which he had invented the title of Utopia—the place that was ‘nowhere.’

In this story about a mythical island situated somewhere in the New World (first printed in Louvain in 1516), More had described the adventures of Raphael Hythlodaye, who had accompanied Amerigo Vespucci on one of his five voyages to the country which was to bear his name. The honest Hythlodaye had entertained his host (Sir Thomas) with a painstaking description of the happiness that was to be found among the inhabitants of this blessed isle of Utopia, drawing some very unfavourable comparisons between their fate and that of the people in England, where the poor were by far too poor and the rich were by far too rich. And he had told Sir Thomas how the Utopians had accomplished their purpose by deciding that everybody must work for his living, and by providing everybody with an equal chance of a good education, and by ordering that all the pleasant things of this earth must be equally shared by those deserving them.

Contemporary critics pointed out that all this had already been threshed out by one Plato. Yes, in a manner, but whereas Plato had been remote, Sir Thomas More had been very much of this world. And that was probably the quality which had first attracted Erasmus. After they had met, the authors of *In Praise of Folly* and of *Utopia* had remained fast friends until the broadsword of the King’s executioner had separated them.

And now they were to meet once more.

The problem of their dinner was really no problem at all. Even so hospitable a house as that of Sir Thomas must have been very British in the food it served, and so we decided upon a *potage aux queues de boeuf* (ox-tail soup, in the vernacular of the day) and then a *gigot d’agneau quimperlaise* (lamb cooked in onions and runner beans and stuffed with little bits of pork fat). For the old cookery book I used insisted that this must be a very lean piece of lamb, and the pork had to take the place of the natural fat. Almost any kind of cabbage would have to take the place of a more civilized vegetable, and, as for a sweet, we decided to repeat that *omelette flambée* which had been such a success with the Prince of Orange and General Washington.

Then came the matter of beverages, and I was reaching out for our wine list when Frits said, “Why give him wine? He was an Englishman. Give him ale—he’ll like that much better.”

I had never thought of it, but of course Frits was right. We could probably import some excellent ale from near-by Flushing (with its constant stream of British visitors), and so everything was ready except for the musical part of the entertainment. We realized that the old gentlemen



SIR THOMAS MORE AND ERASMUS WERE MOST HAPPILY SITTING IN  
FRONT OF THE FIRE

## CHAPTER IV

### This Time ERASMUS Has a Surprise for Us, and We Make the Acquaintance of the BACHS and the BREUGHELs

ON Sunday Erasmus' room remained unoccupied, but when I visited him the next morning he was there working as usual. Frits had taken the mail train for Amsterdam. It was during the days of the Great Insanity, and everybody was making millions. Frits, being a prudent sort of person, left the speculative end of his business carefully alone. He smiled his pleasantest smile at all his customers and pocketed his commissions, whether they won or lost. That was a very useful arrangement, for the queer foods and drinks we needed for our guests cost us a pretty penny, and I was working on my *Rembrandt*, which took more than three years for the actual writing, and of course during that time I could not disturb my mind by trying to please the editors of our magazines, who were for ever telling me that I did not know what the public wanted.

On that particular Monday morning I found Erasmus in a very happy mood. "That was a lovely thing you did for us last Saturday," he told me. "I am deeply grateful, and now I would like to give you a little surprise."

"What is it?" I asked.

"I told you it was to be a surprise. You will meet my Martin Luther."

I tried to find the correct answer in Latin. "*Gratias ornatissime tibi ago.*"

The old man smiled. "Cicero himself could have done no better."

He flattered me, for I knew that there must be many and much more elegant ways of giving thanks in his adopted tongue, and once more I tried to get some hint about his plans. But just as unsuccessfully as the first time, though I got the impression that this might be a somewhat elaborate party when he added, "It is an unfortunate thing, but money does not exist in the world in which I now have my being. Therefore, would it be asking too much if I request that you undertake to pay the bills for a rather liberal supply of sauerkraut and Guelders sausages and a few hundred bottles of beer?"

I told him that I thought it could be done.

"Very well, then," he replied, considering the matter settled. "And I shall also have to ask you to change the hour of the entertainment. Suppose we say Saturday at noon and that for this once you and your friend will be our guests."

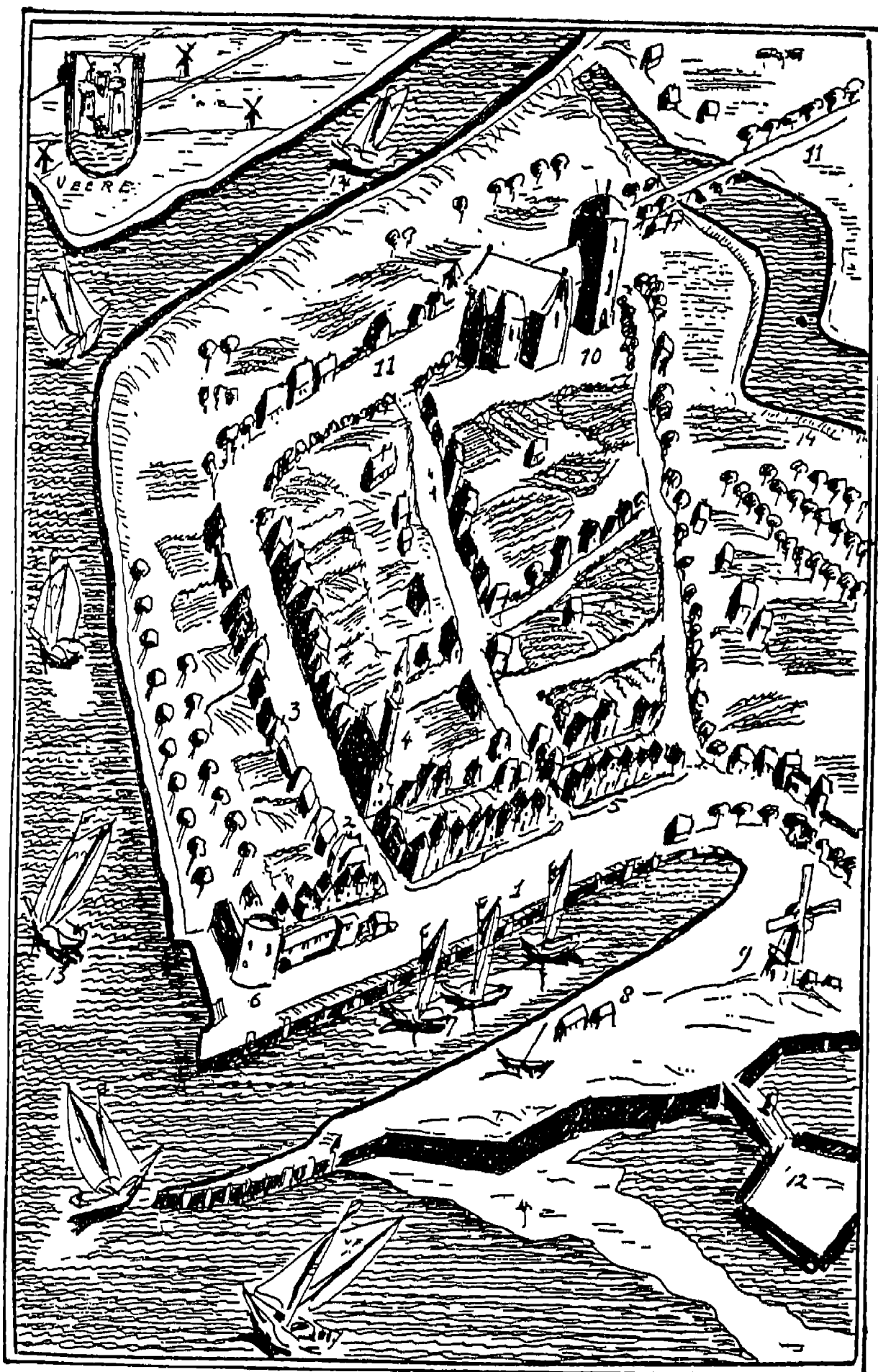
Saturday morning, entertaining Lucie's cat. Lucie's cat had had her third litter of kittens since the beginning of the year and seemed profoundly bored by this everlasting application of Genesis 1, 22. And so, although she was by nature a mean and unfriendly feline, she now looked for human companionship, and when Jimmie went into the kitchen and got her a dish of cream, she so far forgot her superior attitude towards members of the human race as to accept it. This was so unusual a proceeding on the part of this aggressively independent animal that both Jimmie and I watched her while she neatly consumed our generous gift and never noticed that we had a visitor. Leaning on the arm of his famulus, Erasmus had arrived to conduct us personally to his surprise party.

I begged him, before he did anything else, to sit down, for he looked unusually frail at such an early hour, and not until he was safely accommodated on our wide blue peasant bench did I present him to Jimmie, who at once broke the ice by asking him whether he liked cats, whether he ever had had a cat of his own, and whether he had ever heard of her famous cat, Cocaine, who used to protect the Mad Hatter tea-room from invading rodents and once killed a rat almost as large as a St Bernard dog.

Erasmus said that he knew a lot about cats. He had never had any of his own. "You see," he remarked, "they are a little undependable, and for a man of my restless habits of life they may prove a great burden. I had trouble enough packing my books every time I moved. Suppose that at the last moment I should have been obliged to find room for another half-dozen fellow-travellers! But my publishers always had cats. They seem to belong to dusty print-shops and are for ever getting printer's ink in their hair."

Then he changed the subject rather abruptly to compliment Jimmie on her Dutch. This caused my good wife to make a face at me and to remark, "There are those who do not think it quite so good!" but he would not hear of this.

"Our tongue must be very difficult to a foreigner," he said, "but then your English comes rather hard to us—very hard. Some day we shall have a universal language. We have one now, or would have one, if every nation did not insist upon pronouncing Latin in its own way, so that an Englishman and an Italian, while speaking to each other in the vernacular of Cicero, are still completely incomprehensible to each other. I did my best while in Oxford to show them that their way of speaking Latin would have caused Cæsar to put them all to the sword, but they would have none of that. Indeed, they rather hinted that it was Cæsar who should have changed his way of speaking his mother tongue if he had wanted to deal with them. They are a charming people, those English, but perhaps a bit—let me call it insular. However, I should not complain,



### THE VILLAGE OF VEERE

1. The harbour. 2. Frits' house. 3. The Market-place. 4. The town hall. 5. Our own house. 6. The old watch-tower. 7. The old churchyard hidden behind the church. 8. The old wharf. 9. Our village mill. 10. The old church. 11. The road to Middelburg. 12. A Napoleonic rampart. 13. The Scheldt. 14. The Middelburg Canal.

of one who was *Stadt-Musikant* in a near-by village and who sometimes brought his band to play at the fairs in Freiburg, and once in Italy he remembered having listened to a lute-player in Venice—or was it Siena or Bologna?—and the Italians, who were rarely good at instrumental music, had explained that it was a *Bacco*, which he had then taken to be a colloquial term for any wandering musician.

That had been the only reference to these strange dynasties of painters and musicians whose genius, like the waters of the Nile, had fertilized the whole of northern Europe and who had prepared the soil for what was to come during the next hundred years. Erasmus had remembered how greatly we loved them and all their works, and this had been his surprise for us.

About the afternoon that followed I could easily write a whole book, for it was a 'rare occasion'—to use a well-known *cliché*. What made it so interesting to us was to observe with our own eyes how all the arts are truly born out of some deep and irresistible emotion.

Those Bachs and Breughels practised entirely different forms of expression. The Bachs appealed to the ears, whereas the Breughels appealed to the eyes. But how completely they understood each other, even if they failed to use a common language! And since they were enjoying a holiday, they could let themselves go without the thought of possible patrons who might feel inclined to buy their sonatas and fugues or their Madonnas and flowers and landscapes and the merry devils and witches of "Hell" Breughel, the son of old Pieter. They could just be themselves.

Of course, they had done what all good artists do whenever they are not obliged to perform—they had turned the occasion into a large and glorious jam session. Indeed, they were so deeply engrossed in their respective pursuits that they never noticed our arrival but went right on doing what they had been doing from the moment of their arrival. The faithful town treasurer had tried his best to prepare everything for the feast of beer and sauerkraut to follow, and which most of the villagers apparently expected to attend. For ours in many ways was still a good deal of a feudal community, and we never failed to share what we ourselves had with our neighbours. The story of those ten barrels of beer (before the feast was over we had lost count) had spread far and wide, and the large plates of sausages being placed upon the tables made the children stand around with a strange gleam in their eyes. Not that they were hungry—they were merely greedy, and a free meal was a free meal!

But I was going to tell you about our guests of honour. They were sitting in two separate groups—the Bachs on the left and the Breughels on the right. And the Bachs were playing old German square dances for

own sketching-pad out of my pocket, and the moment they noticed that a brother painter had arrived on the scene, they moved over on their bench and begged me to make myself at home, for that is part of the code of all good artists, who believe in absolute equality—but it must be the equality between equals.

At exactly one o'clock Erasmus got up from the chair Frits had told Hein Verlinde to get him from his house and asked for a moment's silence. "I hope," he said, speaking slowly in Flemish so that both the Bachs and the Breughels would be able to understand him, "that you have enjoyed meeting each other and that you will approve of the slight entertainment we have provided for you. I wanted our friends here in the beautiful old city of Veere to realize what we mean when we people of a bygone age speak of our ideals of craftsmanship. It was a craftsmanship that grew out of our comradeship, and that comradeship was born out of the feeling that all of us were citizens of the sovereign and independent commonwealth of the arts and letters. I hope that you will rejoice as I do that we had this chance to meet each other, and now let me bid you to our very simple repast."

Apparently, Erasmus had known what was to the taste of the people of his day, and in this way he taught us a most valuable lesson. Frits and I would have ransacked our old cookery books for special dishes with which to please our guests, but now we discovered (what I had always somewhat suspected) that the average man or woman of three hundred (or three thousand) years ago was accustomed to a kind of fare that to us would seem almost unbearably monotonous. And I also began to understand that most of those fantastic festive meals of the Middle Ages and of Roman times, about which we had read so much in our schoolbooks, referred to the same kinds of outrageous feasts that used to be given in New York fifty years ago, when people with more money than either brains or good taste tried to impress the community at large with the vast sums of money they could spend in the form of 'conspicuous waste.'

At those famous medieval orgies, which often cost small fortunes and not infrequently obliged the hosts to take out an extra mortgage on their heavily burdened estates, it was not really the purpose to delight the palates of the guests with new and harmonious combinations of ingredients that complemented or offset each other. This true secret of all good cooking was not discovered until much later, during the latter half of the eighteenth century. Up to that time the culinary artist had depended upon the principle that whatever was expensive must also be good. But the complete satisfaction with which these good people, members of the solid middle class of their own times, dug into the heaped-up plates of



But Lord help the tavern in which he came upon a bass fiddle, for the patrons would then be treated to a regular boogie-woogie performance in which some of his father's and Herr Georg Friedrich Händel's finest oratorio arias would be tortured into absolute caricatures of themselves.

Shortly after the beer had been passed round, Johann Christoph and Philipp Emanuel Bach came to me and whispered that they were afraid that somewhere or other their poor brother had got hold of something a little stronger than beer and they foresaw that we were in for a kind of entertainment that would hardly be to the liking of "*der alte Herr*." As nothing could stop Friedemann once he was in that mood (as they called it), could we perhaps persuade the old gentleman to take a little walk and entice him away from a scene which would be most painful to him?

Frits (who always took the initiative in a crisis) said, "Sure, just wait a moment," and he suggested to Johann Sebastian that he might like to hear some of his own music as it was now preserved on round black discs and played by a machine: "If you will do us the honour to visit our house you can see and hear some of these discs for yourself." In that way we had escaped from the market-place just when Friedemann, who indeed had had much more than was good for him, was beginning to play *Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring*, on an oboe. I didn't think that the "Old Wig," as the sons called their father behind his back (but loud enough for me to overhear them), noticed the beginning of this little commotion. We knew that he was slightly deaf and were grateful for his affliction, for by the time we had reached Frits' house Friedemann was in full action, having switched over from his oboe to a very powerful bassoon, and had changed from *Jesu, Joy*, to *O Head So Full of Blood and Wounds*, which was hardly more appropriate as a theme for the *Ländler* into which it was being converted than the *My Jesus in Gethsemane* which followed it.

Inside Frits' house it was pleasant and cool, and as soon as we had made Johann Sebastian thoroughly comfortable in the chair we had recently acquired for Erasmus (since he was to be our steady house guest he deserved a chair of his own), we started the gramophone. The first thing we played was number one of *The Well-tempered Clavichord*. Johann Sebastian listened in silence. The gramophone as such did not seem to impress him very greatly, and as time went on and we met more and more people of a bygone age, we were surprised to observe how little interest they felt for most of our proud modern inventions. As soon as they had given them one look, they took them for granted. They were there. They made life a little simpler and that was very nice, but did it really make much difference? Was it really so tremendously important whether a traveller got from one town to another a little faster or a little slower or whether a letter reached its destination within a day or

"To save time."

"And what do they do with the time they have saved when they get there?"

To which we could not find a fitting reply, knowing that the time thus saved was as a rule wasted on an unsuccessful effort to have some more time to kill at the other end of the journey. And so, after a while, we avoided the subject of progress altogether because we ourselves were beginning to doubt the value of many of those marvellous inventions which until then we had been taught to accept as the one redeeming feature of an age which was sadly lacking in many of those qualities of charm and leisure and contentment which we used to associate with the era of our grandparents.

Of course, as we went down to the bottom of this superior attitude of our visitors towards all our 'improvements'—as we did one rainy Sunday afternoon—we discovered that much of it was merely a pose, for they greatly liked such inventions and innovations as fitted in with their own scheme of living. Erasmus, for example, could never find sufficient words of praise for our open fires and our chimneys. "In my day," so he told us, "chimneys had not yet been invented. I mean this sort of chimney, which really gets rid of the smoke. In our halls in Oxford and Cambridge we had a fire in the middle of the room and the smoke went up through a hole in the roof. It was terrible. The smoke used to make our eyes ache on cold days, and the fires were never able to keep us warm, and we had to go to bed in order not to freeze. The Swiss and the Germans did much better with their tile stoves, but in our own country, with its little peat fires, the winter was a nightmare."

Then there was the Empress Theodora. She took the greatest delight in our window-panes. Nothing else interested her quite as much. She thought a bullock-cart quite as good a mode of conveyance from Constantinople to Adrianople as those trains of which we showed her the pictures. But window-panes fascinated her.

"In my day," she explained, "we only had a little glass in our chapels and churches, and all of my palaces were terribly draughty. Even when at night we closed the windows with wooden blinds, the wine froze in our tankards."

Voltaire was most of all impressed with Frits' typewriter. "If I had had one of those contraptions," he said, playing with the keys, "I might really have done a little writing."

"Pardon me," Frits observed, "but the other day an antiquary in The Hague offered me your collected works. I think there were eighty volumes."

"*Monsieur a raison*," Voltaire answered with a bow, "but with one of

the turn-table. As for us, we knew nothing about her presence until suddenly we heard Bach's *Fugue in G minor*, originally written for the organ but now arranged for full orchestra by one of the most popular American conductors. Once this fugue had been started we had no other choice but to listen to it in silence until it should have come to an end, which it did with a terrific crash of brass and with a dozen bombardons going full blast.

Bach, we noticed, had listened with grave interest. When it was finished, he said, "That really was most interesting. But what was it? Perhaps something by Vivaldi? In that case, he must have written it when he was quite young and still had a great deal to learn."

Fortunately, we were spared further explanations by the fact that it was almost seven o'clock. And so we hastily got out our guest book and asked the old master to honour us with his autograph. Just as he put a dot behind his name and made ready to add his *Kapellmeister* titles, the clock struck the hour for departure. This time there was no candle flicker. It was still full daylight, and no darkness was to descend upon us. But when we had become accustomed to the unexpected silence, our guests were gone. Dozens of half-empty glasses of beer and half-finished plates of sauerkraut bore witness to the fact that there had been a party. And in one corner of the room we found the shoes of poor Friedemann, who had made himself comfortable before he had started to sleep off his booze.

## CHAPTER V

### We Entertain Three Great Masters of the Spoken and Written Word and Are Honoured by the Presence of CERVANTES, SHAKESPEARE, and MOLIERE

F RITS and I were delighted with our last party and expressed our gratitude to Erasmus.

"But who next?" we asked him.

"If you don't mind a suggestion—but I do not want to influence your choice—how would it be if you now varied your diet by inviting a few of the world's great writers? You have had statesmen and musicians and painters. Why not invite two or three of the men who have influenced the world by their pens, either in writing books or plays?"

We told him that such a varied diet would be most welcome and thanked him for the suggestion. Thereupon Frits and I spent the rest of the Sunday going through a list of available candidates. In the end, we agreed upon one writer and two playwrights, for all three of them had exercised a profound influence upon the history of their day. Besides, they would be amusing guests. I copied their names on a slip of paper, and on his way home Frits put this unusual kind of invitation underneath the old lion who guarded the entrance to the town hall.

The dinner we meant to serve that evening was an easy one, for our guests had lived at approximately the same time. But as one of them was a Frenchman, we decided to have more vegetables than usual and leave out the lamb, as lamb is rather an acquired taste with most Frenchmen. The Spaniard was rather a problem, but as he had spent many years of his life in a Barbary prison, we felt that he would be willing to eat anything we gave him—and glad of the chance. I remembered how, in one of his last letters commenting upon the sad state of his finances (in spite of all the hard work he had done) and the even more painful condition of his body, Cervantes had mentioned the fact that, as he had only two teeth left (and they failed to meet!), he was hardly able to eat anything at all. Soft and easily chewed food would therefore be most acceptable to the poor old Don, and the immortal William, too, would probably have a pretty bad set of teeth and would also welcome a purée or a ragout.

This was the menu we meant to place before our guests. We would begin with a fish soup *à la marseillaise*. We thought that they would like this because there was a good deal of onion in it, and we felt sure that



THE EMPRESS OF BYZANTIUM STOOD IN THE DOORWAY

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we could get enough oysters and shrimps and small lobsters from the local fishermen to turn the whole thing into just that sort of aquatic mish-mash which seems to have been so popular with our ancestors. And the orange-peel we could put into it would be an amusing novelty for the Englishman and the Frenchman, whereas the bouillon we would use as stock would be good for the half-starved Spaniard.

Our main dish had to be something neutral, and what is more neutral than some kind of chicken? We had had turkey for General Washington two weeks before, and besides, turkeys are hard to get in Europe, for the climate is too wet. But how about a *poularde truffée à la Périgueux*? We thought that Monsieur Molière would appreciate a lot of truffles, and we told Jo to count on half a pound of truffles for each chicken and to use a lot of pork fat. A little more onion would do no harm, and we suggested that she use two hours to get the dish ready instead of the usual hour and a half.

As for vegetables, a salad was out of the question, for although salads had come in with Henry VIII's ill-fated wife, Catherine of Aragon, they would, we were sure, not yet have penetrated far into the lower layers of English society, where the people have been so hopelessly conservative in their way of eating that, even to-day, a change in the food of the sailors or soldiers is apt to lead to mutiny.

So for the benefit of William Shakespeare it had to be cabbage, but in fairness to Molière we ordered *choux farcis*, small individual cabbages, each one hiding a roll of Dutch *gehakt*, which, according to my wife, is merely a variant upon our domestic hamburger steak, but which is one of the delicacies dear to the palate of every good Hollander. Indeed, when mixed with bread and truffles, *gehakt* is something as far removed from hamburger as Dutch *rolpens* is from Philadelphia meat-roll.

Also for the benefit of Molière, there was to be an extra dish of our usual runner beans with melted butter, and Cervantes would find a large bowl of ripe olives by the side of his plate. As we could not very well have an *omelette flambée* at every one of our dinners, we ordered a large *gâteau à la parisienne aux pommes et pistaches*.

The taste of pistachio added to a rather fanciful apple tart would strike them as something new, and if Shakespeare decided that it was too 'new' to suit him, he could have all the cheese he wanted. As I myself detested cheese, I had completely forgotten to order it for our previous guests. Frits kindly reminded me that very few people shared my absurd prejudices, and he told Jo to see to it that there was a generous collection of different kinds of cheeses, which were to be held in reserve until they should be needed.

As for coffee—yes, why not? We had discovered that even those of our visitors who had been born before coffee had been introduced into

were quite satisfied to sit and eat and talk. But during the first half-hour or so, music seemed quite helpful. It broke the ice and started the conversation going.

As the three men who were to come the next Saturday were well-known public figures, it was not necessary to go into too many details about their lives. The reports I sent to Amsterdam on Tuesday were therefore quite brief.

Shakespeare, William. Born in Stratford-on-Avon in Warwickshire in the year 1564. Exact date unknown, but baptized on April 26. His father, John, seems to have been a glovemaker, but he is also referred to as a butcher and a wool-dealer. Whatever he did to make a living, it seems that he was a man of some standing in his own small community, for he was one of the first burgesses of the recently incorporated town of Stratford and was held in sufficient esteem to be elected to a municipal office. The most important authentic document we have about him is the receipt for a fine which he was condemned to pay for maintaining a dung-heap in the street in which he lived. This bears out the suggestion—often made—that he had started life as a farmer and had only moved to the city after he had become sufficiently opulent to aspire to a rank in society slightly superior to that of a mere Warwickshire yeoman—a promotion which made him hope that some day he might even be allowed to display a coat of arms of his own.

That seems a rather foolish ambition to us of the present day, but in the early sixteenth century it was the equivalent of every immigrant's dream of driving a Packard as soon as he is able to pay a little something on the first instalment.

We are ignorant about Master William's earlier years, except that he was apparently his parents' third child, that he probably went to the local grammar school (a survival of an earlier age, when the monasteries had looked after the schooling of all children), and that he might have gone even further in life than he did, but for the unfortunate circumstance that his father fared none too well among his new and unfamiliar surroundings, gradually lost all his property, and became disqualified from holding any further official positions.

Young William was therefore obliged to shift for himself, which he did by acting as an assistant to his father after the latter had gone back to his earlier trade of a butcher. According to highly doubtful popular rumour, he did not succeed very well, being in the habit of delighting the boys of the neighbourhood by declaiming poetry and indulging in highfalutin speeches while cutting the throats of his father's hogs, rather than paying attention to the business at hand.

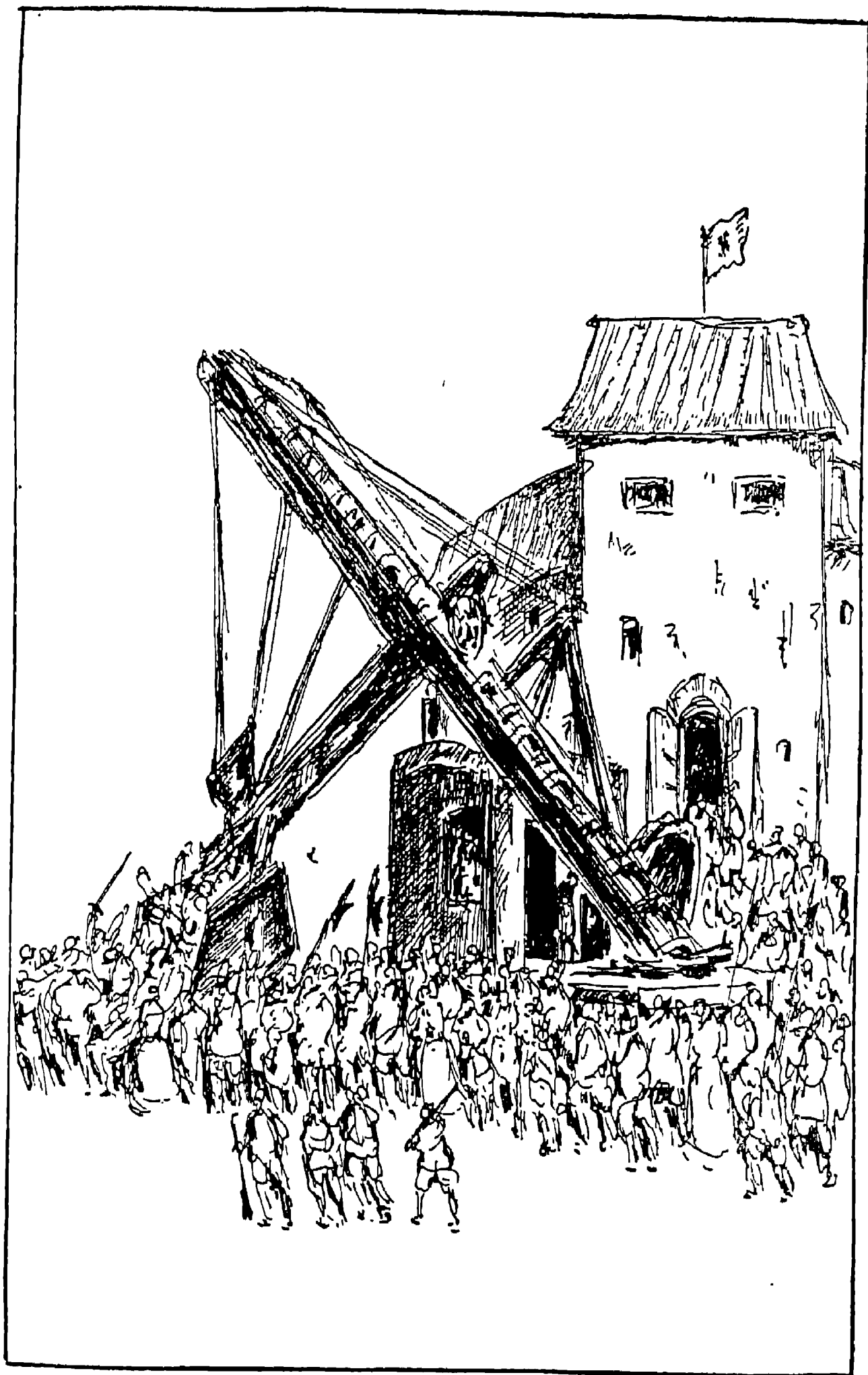
the last to suggest itself. For although towards the end of his London residence, William was deemed worthy of joining the "King's men"—the company of actors enjoying the direct and immediate patronage of his Majesty—at no time were the Londoners thoroughly aware of the true merits of this myriad-minded little man from the provinces, who in his thirty-seven plays did what no one else before or since has been able to do. For he dumped the whole of humanity at our feet and said, "There, my friends! Look at it. I know it is a pretty terrible mess, but don't get angry or annoyed with me because you don't like it. Mankind was not created according to my own specifications. All I can do is to show you what it really looks like. Beyond that my responsibility comes to an end."

The immortal William, having been the subject of several hundred years of the most minute form of scholarship and criticism, has, of course, been compared with everything underneath the sun, the moon, and the far-flung stars. I happen to take the members of my own craft a little less seriously (we artists understand each other in those respects), and to me, my dear Frits, he is very much like one of those incredible fellows who handle a steam shovel. They look like nothing in particular. Socially they rate with—well, with other people who handle dredges or steam shovels. As a rule they are extremely careless about their personal appearance. They are addicted to everlasting and very cheap cigarettes, but they handle their unwieldy monsters with the easy elegance of a cowboy nonchalantly riding an unwilling and bucking broncho. Indeed, they succeed so well in hiding the difficulties connected with the steam-shovel technique that they make the spectator feel, "Aw, shucks! Anyone can do that." Let him try, and in the hospital he will have ample time to repent of his foolish action.

The comparison, however, does not stop there. If you will only watch the steam-shovel virtuoso for a little while, you will agree with me that there exists a close analogy between him and the immortal William. Observe him just after he has made a haul. He pulls his levers and, behold! the strange cargo he has just dug out of the soil or fished out of the muddy waters is unceremoniously dumped upon street or quay or wherever the master happens to be practising his trade at that moment, and there it lies, for whatever it is worth.

William Shakespeare was such a steam-shovel operator, only he dealt with human beings instead of geological deposits. He was just as little concerned about the moral values of the material he dug up as the steam-shovel man who is at this moment digging that new canal near Flushing. Maybe his iron bucket has broken into the grave of a long-forgotten divine, buried in the seclusion of his little cloister garden six or seven hundred years before you and I first set foot upon our beloved island. Or





SHAKESPEARE, THE HUMAN DREDGE

But about this final period of his life we again know very little. And why should we? Isn't it enough for us to have fallen heir to everything his genius bestowed upon us? Must we also know the maiden name of the grandmother of the notary public who drafted the famous will of March 25, 1616?

And now a word about our second guest, Monsieur Jean Baptiste Poquelin, more generally known as Molière. He was born six years after Shakespeare died, and he was the son of a Parisian tradesman who eventually acquired the title of a royal upholsterer. That was a wonderful thing! What greater honour could mere mortal men hope to achieve? If one lived in the France of the seventeenth century and happened to have been born an upholsterer, one either had to become a royal upholsterer or hide one's head in shame and perhaps kill oneself, as poor Vatel did when the fish for the royal luncheon had failed to arrive on time and he would have been obliged to serve his master a meal without a fish course.

Young Jean Baptiste was brought up in a house called *la maison des singes*, or "the monkey house." As the monkey was the symbol of the comic actor, he therefore came by his love for the theatre in an entirely normal fashion. His father, however, did not at all share his son's enthusiasm for a career on the boards. Having only recently succeeded his uncle as *valet de chambre tapissier du roi*, the good upholsterer had made up his mind that his son should succeed him. Three generations of Poquelins, repairing the royal footstools and fighting the moths in the royal wardrobe—*mon dieu!* what a past and what a future: security combined with honour! Could any Frenchman ask for more?

Yes, one of them did. That was our little Jean Baptiste, who had inherited the quick brain and the cultural ambitions of his mother, Marie Cressé, also the daughter of a member of the upholsterers' guild. He had no desire to spend all his days with a thimble on his finger and a pair of shears dangling from his side. And from his earliest childhood he had only one ambition. He must become an actor.

Here we find ourselves face to face with the question: where and how had Jean Baptiste ever learned anything about the stage?

He had done so, of all things, through another upholsterer, a friend of his father, who belonged to a religious society which had a private box in one of the local theatres. The rest you can guess for yourself. Through influential friends of the king's own upholsterer, the boy was sent to a school patronized by boys considerably above his own rank. It was, however, a first-rate educational establishment and, like all French schools dominated by the Church, it laid great stress upon the educational advantages of amateur theatricals.

This could never have happened to-day, but it was still possible in the middle of the seventeenth century, for, in spite of much evidence to the contrary, Paris had not yet entirely absorbed the whole of France. There were still provincial capitals which had remained important centres of local culture. Paris might scoff at them, but they took themselves very seriously. They had their own aristocracy, which still lived in the same houses their great-grandfathers had built, after the destruction of their castles during the Fronde and the long religious warfare had driven them to town. They were conscious that their lives lacked some of the elegance of existence at court, but they consoled themselves for this lack of gaiety by pointing to the seriousness with which they observed the Ten Commandments and all the official holidays and fast days of the Christian Church and to the thoroughness with which they educated their children to become pillars of strength for Pope, for country, and for king. (Of course, the king should come second, but it scans better that way.)

These good people were very careful with their pennies, but they would loosen their purse-strings when it came to their own provincial academies of literature, their own religious organizations, their own academies of art. At least once a year they would make arrangements to have the local theatre occupied by a troupe of strolling actors. They realized that the Church disapproved with increasing severity of everything connected with the stage, as a possible agent of unorthodox and revolutionary ideas, but since the local bishops depended to a great extent upon the good-will of the local marquises and counts and barons, it was to the interest of these religious dignitaries to close an occasional eye. In short, they rarely interfered openly with that annual week of serious theatre-going.

When these honest small-town people discovered that, instead of the usual third- and fourth-rate actors (hardly one of whom could read a line correctly), they were now able to engage a most delightful, courteous, and accomplished gentleman with a leading lady who not only knew how to 'lead' but who also was a 'lady,' and a retinue of fellow-actors who were far superior to the common run of Thespians, they were delighted, and there was a steady demand for the troupe of the distinguished Monsieur Molière.

At first Molière contented himself with merely being an actor. He still had to learn his trade. But as time went on, he tried his hand at a little writing and, behold! the world looked and listened and said, "Here is a new sound—a new approach. Here at last is something alive and kicking. We like it. Let us have more of it."

That, of course, is what every artist hopes for—a public that wants a second and a third and a fourth helping. And Molière, being no different

the Middle Ages (when it had been synonymous with a living death), the people of Paris—especially the women—were still too much under the thumb of their spiritual shepherds to be willing to run such a risk for a single evening at the theatre.

The King confessed that he was powerless if that was the way the clergy felt about it, and he suggested that Monsieur Molière had better write something else and forget about this unfortunate experience. Monsieur Molière, as always, professed himself his Majesty's most obedient servant, withdrew the piece, wrote many other comedies, and eighteen months later played *Tartuffe* and found that nobody was any longer sufficiently interested to start a new campaign of denunciation.

Such everlasting quarrels, however, with stupid opponents were bad for Molière's health. The modern diagnosis of his ailment would probably indicate a case of gastric ulcers, which very often are caused by too much worry. Then, as now, a milk diet was prescribed. Molière drank his milk like a good patient, but he continued to write the plays that suited his own fancy and he did so until the last day of his life. But it was a difficult struggle, and in the end he grew very, very tired.

Now, of course, if this were fiction instead of fact, Molière would have had a happy home with a loving wife, where he could have found peace and quiet after his continuous struggles with what Voltaire, three generations later, was to call *l'infâme*, leaving it to his readers to decide what institution he meant by "the infamous one." Unfortunately, in the case of Molière, there was a home, but not the right kind of wife. The woman he had married was very beautiful and the best actress in his troupe, but she had been a source of great annoyance to her husband, not by anything she had done but by the fact that she had been born without a satisfactory birth-certificate.

It is only within comparatively recent times that we have got hold of the facts in the case, and now the learned world seems to have pretty well agreed that Armande Béjart was a younger sister of Madeleine Béjart and that therefore the actor-playwright had not been guilty of marrying his former mistress's daughter, but her sister. Why old Madame Béjart had felt it necessary to be quite so mysterious about the birth of her last daughter we do not know. But when Molière—then well advanced in middle age—took this very young girl to be his wedded wife, all his many enemies, led by revengeful Monsieur Tartuffe, hastened out of their hiding-places, and the amount of mud they slung would have delighted the hearts of our least scrupulous social columnists.

Since another century and a half had to go by before a lucky find in one of the French archives (O, admirably orderly sons of Gaul!) established the fact that Armande Béjart was really and truly old Madame

Before Molière began to write, to act, and to manage, the comedians and tragedians of western Europe had enjoyed the same status as they had done in ancient Rome, where the official world had regarded them as belonging to the ranks of the common vagabonds who were entitled to no better treatment than that which was meted out to bands of ordinary strolling gypsies. Once an actor had actually sat down at table to dine with the King (a privilege rarely enjoyed by even the highest of court officials), all this was radically changed.

When Franz Liszt comes for dinner (I very much hope we can have him if we can find a congenial fellow-guest), we will ask him to tell us how he succeeded in training his princely employers and teaching them decent manners whenever they attended a concert. He did it, of course, by that inner cultivation which made him the social equal of those established in the seats of the mighty. Molière, too, seems to have had that rare gift of impressing his personality upon his environment to a very high degree. Like all sufferers from gastric troubles (my own diagnosis, as I told you, but based upon sound practical experience), he was given to fits of melancholia and of doubt and to deep questioning of the soul. But he was much too well bred to let physical discomforts interfere with his good humour. He remained courteous and considerate. Even when he was suffering intense pain his wit continued to flow as merrily as a mountain stream hastening to the near-by valley. With his happy balance of stoicism and epicureanism (high thinking and intelligent living), he was at home in every kind of society. Conscious of his own weaknesses, he was tolerant in his attitude towards the foibles of his neighbours. He was an obedient son of the Church and carefully performed all his religious duties, but at the same time he, like most intelligent Frenchmen of the age of Louis XIV (the King included), was also somewhat of a disciple of the great Descartes and preferred to erect his spiritual convictions upon a basis of mathematical certainty. (Make a note of it: let us have Descartes to dinner as soon as it can be arranged.)

This attitude towards the universe and its Creator, which during the next two hundred years was to make France the undisputed leader within the realm of thought, was not looked upon with great favour on the other side of the Alps, where now for exactly a century and a half, in an atmosphere of an absolutely unyielding and unbending clericalism, one Italian Pope had succeeded the next and where the whole world was held to be out of step except the battalions of the Castle of San Angelo.

The secret agents of the Vicar of Christ on earth were working with unflagging zeal to detect and expose every sign, however mild, of incipient heresy. Frontal attacks were not, of course, to be feared. Those princes who still acknowledged the supremacy of the Holy See could easily be

preceded him by just a year, had escaped a similar fate by solemnly renouncing her former profession just before she went to her death. But Molière had been stricken before he had been able to write that part into his own rôle, and, in all fairness to him, it is to be doubted whether he could ever have been guilty of such an act of moral cowardice. There is no secret, however, about the way in which his mortal remains were treated. The Archbishop of Paris (a man notorious for his own loose morals) refused to let this strolling player be buried in consecrated ground and denied a request for such funeral services as were usually accorded to the remains of good Christians. The horrified widow then appealed to the king, and Louis, who seems to have felt a very genuine personal affection for this humble subject who had contributed so greatly to the fame of his reign, did what he would hardly have dared to do for the mightiest of his nobles. He sent word to the Archbishop that he would not tolerate such an insult to the memory of an old friend. Whereupon the Archbishop suggested one of those compromises which sounded very reasonable but settled nothing. As a special favour, two priests would be allowed to attend the funeral, which must, however, be held after sunset and without any special ceremonies. Otherwise the late Monsieur Molière must be buried with the condemned criminals and the people who had committed suicide.

The question of consecrated ground or unconsecrated ground was not specifically mentioned. There is reason, however, to suspect that Molière's grave was dug in that part of the cemetery of St Joseph which had not been consecrated. But again, we have no certainty. We can only guess, and as a result no one to-day knows exactly where the greatest of all French playwrights lies buried.

One more interesting fact that throws a most revealing light upon the slender esteem in which the official world of the seventeenth century still held its actors. Molière was never elected a member of the French Academy. And when next you read one of those hopelessly dull French novels which you were induced to buy because you had noticed on the outside that it was the work of a *membre de l'Académie Française*—then remember, my dear Frits, that these honoured fossils had refused to associate themselves with the son of a royal upholsterer, although he happened to be the only one of their contemporaries who to-day is as much alive as he was when he made the whole civilized world roar with derisive laughter at his exposure of those presumptuous pedants who are mankind's most dangerous enemies.

The French Academy refused to open its doors to Monsieur Molière, but—come to think of it—a hundred years later the Swedish Academy

had to do with making the Spanish and Irish people what they are to-day. Undoubtedly, it had greatly influenced the spiritual and intellectual and moral development of the Iberians and Hibernians. But why did it fail to maintain its power among the peoples of northern and western Europe, who lived under exactly the same conditions as the Spaniards and Irish? I was never able to find a satisfactory solution, and so I finally deposited the problem in my well-stocked folder marked "Unsolved and Unsolvable Puzzles" and ceased to worry about it.

I suppose we are all of us born with certain blind spots, and the best thing to do is to acknowledge them and then try and let them do as little damage as possible. For why bother about such personal idiosyncrasies when there are so many other things which need our immediate attention and which are capable of being changed for the better by our own individual efforts?

The name Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra sounds very elegant, and I suppose it means something to a Spaniard. I have, however, given up inquiring into the meaning of names, as it is a practice apt to lead to serious disappointments. Take, for example, that interesting Russian, Count Leo Tolstoy, the author of *War and Peace*, the best historical novel thus far written. Count Leo Tolstoy! How very typically Russian! And how romantic!

The heavy-browed Muscovite nobleman with his bare toes sticking out of the mud and with his well-worn peasant blouse! Only a true aristocrat could afford to be quite so demonstratively democratic. Then I learned Russian, and the first adjective I was asked to decline was *tolstoi*, or 'fat,' and so the author of *Anna Karenina* and the *Kreutzer Sonata* was, after all, nothing more impressive than Mr Leo Fat.

A few years later I fell under the spell of the Provence language and took such a liking to that land whither culture and learning had fled after the fall of Rome that I decided to learn the vernacular of the picturesque Monsieur Frédéric Mistral. Until, one day, Jimmie asked, "Still busy with Fred Northwind?" The spell was broken. Fred Northwind would have fitted into a drug-store in Dorset, Vermont, or he might be running a gas station in Old Greenwich, Connecticut, but as the leader of a glorious literary movement, God forbid! As such a leader he was out.

And so I gave up, and although I have had ample opportunity to find out from those of my Spanish friends not yet shot by the noble General Franco, I have most carefully refrained from inquiring into the meaning of both *Cervantes* and *Saavedra*. But I knew the man himself fairly well from the novel written about him by the excellent Hermann Kesten. What a curious life he had lived! Surely not since the late lamented Job has

amount, but Don Miguel himself had to remain where he was until several thousand more ducats should have been raised and paid over the counter.

Cervantes, knowing only too well that his parents could do nothing further for him, decided to help himself. Once more he ran away. Once more he was caught, but this time he was condemned to two thousand strokes with the cat-o'-nine-tails. As a rule, twenty blows were enough to kill a man, but the sentence was never carried out. For this Spaniard was a most likable fellow, and Hassan Pasha, the Algerian viceroy, so greatly admired his wit and steadfast courage that he had taken him under his special protection. Business, however, was business, and three thousand ducats would not be a penny too much for this strange Spaniard who, in rags and loaded down with chains, could still stalk around with a dignity few Turks possessed.

Once more Papa and Mamma Cervantes—poor folk at best—began the hopeless task of raising what to them must have seemed like several million, and once again the monks who specialized in these labours of mercy began to travel between Algiers and Valencia to make offers and listen to counter-offers.

These endless years of waiting grew unbearable to Cervantes, and so, for a change, he induced several of his fellow-prisoners to join him in an effort to steal a frigate and make a bold run for liberty. The plan might have succeeded if it had not been betrayed by one of the very monks—a Dominican—who had been entrusted with the task of buying his freedom from his captors in Algeria. A third attempt at escape under Moorish law meant a sentence of death, but Hassan Pasha still loved his proud don. Once more Cervantes was forgiven.

Finally, after an interminable period of negotiating the parties of the first part (the relatives in Spain) and the parties of the second part (the Algerian dealers in human flesh) came to an agreement, and, just before he was packed off to Constantinople to be sold in open market, Cervantes was set free. He landed in his native land in November 1580. It was nine years since he had last set foot on Spanish soil. Anyone less optimistic would have said, "Enough is enough! I probably was not born under a lucky star. I'll take a little job somewhere far removed from all human traffic and live there ever after." But not Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra! Not he. For now he ventured forth upon an even more perilous voyage than that of a sailor bound for the North African ports. He became a hack writer in the Spain of the latter half of the sixteenth century.

By this step Cervantes merely changed from one kind of slavery to another. In Algiers the weather at least had been pleasant. But Madrid, then as now, was a dreary, wind-swept jumping-off place. Only, once



But it was too late. A lifetime of toil and the years of his Algerian captivity, together with his endless struggle against poverty, were beginning to tell. He was sixty-nine years old. Everything he had ever tried to do had ended in failure. Early in April of the year 1616 he took to his bed. He did not have a cent to his name and lived in one of the poorest quarters of the town, but until the very end he remained a soldier and, above all things, a Spanish gentleman. And just like Molière, who was to die practising his craft, Cervantes continued to write until the moment of his death.

He was buried with the simple ceremonies of a member of the Tertiary order of the Franciscans, and his bones were laid to rest in one of Madrid's many churches—one attached to the convent of the Trinitarian nuns. His grave has never been found, and after his only surviving child, an illegitimate daughter, had died in the year 1652, nothing remained on our planet to remind us of Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra except half a dozen immortal characters in a book, but what a book, my dear Frits, and what characters!

The clock struck seven. When, according to custom, we opened the door Shakespeare and Cervantes were standing outside, waiting to enter. That, however, took considerable time, as these two punctilious gentlemen were most particular as to who should precede whom. In the end the Spaniard won, and we invited our guests to warm themselves before the fire and to partake of a glass of sherry and a biscuit.

We were sorry to discover that even our combined store of Spanish was not quite up to the task of conversing with Don Miguel in his native tongue. Fortunately, he had acquired a smattering of Italian during his long residence in Algiers (where that tongue seems to have been more generally spoken than Spanish), and so we got along quite nicely, and whenever we got stuck I could always draw a picture, which not only settled the difficulty but also caused great merriment to the good don, who was as simple-minded in all his reactions to everything that happened as a boy of ten.

At first Cervantes was almost entirely eclipsed by Master Will Shakespeare, who was very much the man of the world in his fine velvet coat and somewhat given to patronizing his humbler Spanish *confrère*. But he did not overdo it, and besides, Cervantes was much too civil to show that he noticed this superior attitude on the part of his English friend. And so everything went along quite harmoniously, with Erasmus inquiring into the kind of work Mr Shakespeare might have done while alive and asking Cervantes whether, during the years he had spent in Valladolid, he had ever come across the tracks of the famous Cardinal Ximenes,

"You were so generous as to invite me here for dinner to-night. It was the first invitation I had received for almost three hundred years, and I, who have sat down at meat with his Majesty himself, I must confess that sometimes I miss a little social excitement. And now, to find myself in the presence of this distinguished scholar—I recognize him from his pictures and how much, as a young boy, I enjoyed his *Éloge de la folie*—your humble servant, Monsieur Érasme! But to return to the cause of my unfortunate delay—I lost my wig and in a curious way, too, through sheer curiosity.

"You see, I was a little too early and I decided to take a walk. This is a charming village and such nice people! Well, I lost my way, but I met a lady who spoke perfect French and if I am not mistaken she recognized me, for, in describing your house to me, she quoted something I once wrote so that I would be sure to find it. And when I looked at her (rather quizzically, I am afraid), she added that while very young she had been devoted to a certain Monsieur Racine. Her mentioning the name of Racine cannot have been mere accident either. Indeed, I suspect that she must have known how I felt about Racine—a marvellous talent—a genius when it came to writing verse—but a hopeless bore the moment he put aside his goose quill and tried to behave like a human being.

"I assure you, however, it was a joy to come to a little village like this, so far away from civilization—oh, I beg your pardon! I mean, of course, so far away from Paris!—and to find that my beloved France lives here too, and so I bade the good lady farewell and walked down to your harbour and, as I am alive and talking to you, there—right before my eyes—I saw a sight I shall never forget. Of course I must have been deceived in what I thought I noticed, for such things simply could not be. This country is far away from Spain, and it must have been a mirage. And so I went down to the water front to make sure, and it was then that a gust of wind came and blew off my wig, which fell into the harbour, and no one was there to fish it out for me, and anyway, I was too fascinated to think of anything else.

"For there—though I am sure you won't believe me—right there on your dike—dike, I think you call it—and staring at a near-by windmill—I saw—so help me all the saints in heaven!—I saw the noble Don Quixote wildly waving his lance and making ready to charge the windmill that stood on the other side of the canal—and the next moment . . ."

But here he was interrupted by a cry of despair from Cervantes. "*Dios mío! Dios mío!*" he shouted. "Is that crazy fool at it again? Can't he ever leave me alone—even for a single moment? What will he do next?"

This may have been meant as a purely academic question, but we had our answer right away. From the market-place there arose a loud hue

and cry. Our guests, of course, had no idea what was being said, but Frits and I had, and Erasmus, too, was familiar enough with the Zeeland dialect to know that some one was loudly hollering for the police and that others were crying out, "Hang the dirty thief."

Frits and I rushed to the door. We beheld a queer sight. The whole street leading from the market to the harbour was filled with small children shrieking loud imprecations at a man on horseback. That man on horseback—as we did not have to be told, for there was no other like him in this world—was the noble Don Quixote himself, and right behind him we noticed his faithful servant, Sancho Panza.

One glimpse at the situation made it clear that we had arrived just in time to prevent a scandal. When a mob of children in the Low Countries begins to take off its wooden shoes and prepares for battle—then something has to be done, and right away, or heads are sure to be broken. And so we pitched in, and Frits, who is much better at handling crowds than I—probably because he is much less self-conscious—pushed two of the most belligerent youngsters away, banged their heads together (just for good measure), and shouted, "Here, you rascals! This won't do. Behave yourselves. What's the matter with you? Have all of you gone crazy?"

"No, Mynheer Philips," and the voice was that of a woman in Arнемuiden costume. "I know it won't do, but please look at that big crazy galoot on his old nag and dressed up in a kitchen stove! I had come to Veere to try and sell a few chickens, and now will you please look at what that fellow has got on the end of his stick?"

We looked and burst out laughing, for at the end of the don's lance there was a chicken, neatly speared and floating in the air way above the heads of the crowd. Apparently the don, having been unable to charge his windmill because of the intervening canal, had found some other outlet for his playful activities. He seemed quite satisfied with himself and showed no sign of any desire to placate the outraged chicken-woman.

God only knows how the incident would have ended if it had not been for Cervantes coming to our assistance with all possible haste of his gouty feet. He walked straight up to the don and spoke to him sharply in what must have been an Andalusian dialect, for neither Frits nor I understood a word of what he said. There was no doubt, however, about the efficacy of his words. Immediately, the don was all smiles. He bowed low to his creator, climbed off his horse, took the chicken off his lance, returned it to the Arнемuiden *vrouw*, and then, with a noble flourish, tried to kiss her hand, a courtesy she avoided by smacking him firmly across the cheek.

"Hold on, that's enough," Cervantes commanded. "Get back on your



THE MOAT HAD BAFFLED THE NOBLE DON READY TO CHARGE  
OUR WINDMILL



THE NOBLE DON HAD STOLEN A CHICKEN

the creatures of his imagination. It is their curse, but it is also their reward, and I am sure they would not want it otherwise."

Frits looked rather surprised at this statement. "Wasn't that rather the exception than the rule—what happened here to-night?" he inquired, filling the glass of the immortal William, who seemed to have a first-rate thirst and who, after a single glass of wine, and having expressed his preference for ale, was now drinking it at such a rate of speed that I had



MOLIÈRE WITHOUT HIS WIG. THE HANDKERCHIEF HE BORROWED  
FROM US

already ordered Hein to go to the village inn and get some more. "Don Quixote is, of course, one of the most restless of all literary characters. But I am sure that most of the others are not quite like him."

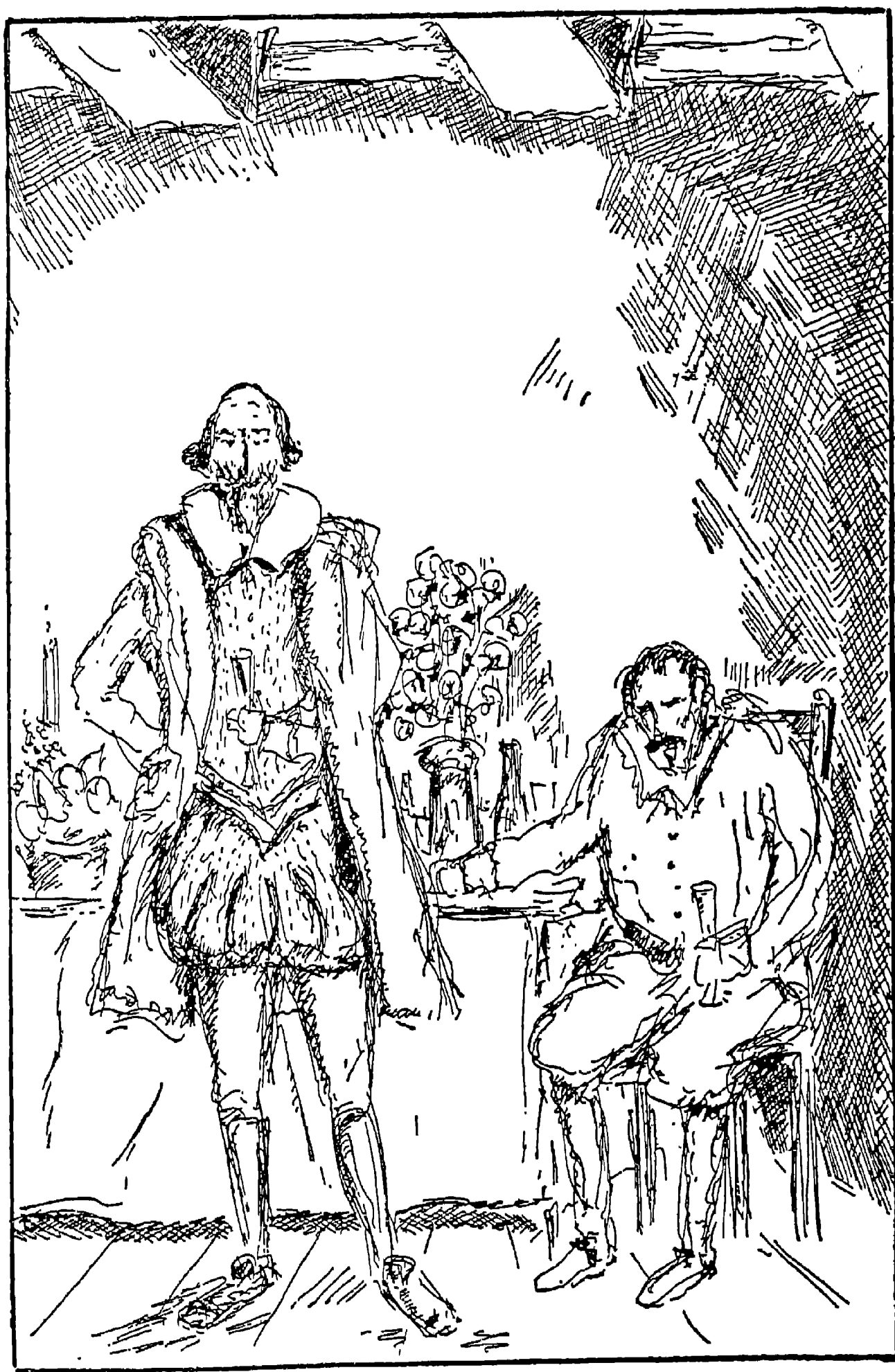
"If you are under that impression, my good friend," Erasmus, who was sitting nearest to the window, told Frits, "then please look at the house opposite—that old empty house near the corner."

All of us leaned forward in our chairs to catch a glimpse of the house he indicated. According to the people of Veere it had once upon a time belonged to a retired sea captain who had hanged himself in the attic out of sheer boredom. Since then it had stood unoccupied, for the villagers believed it to be haunted. As far as any of us knew, the front door had not been opened for more than fifty years. With its broken windows and its cracked stoop, it looked eerie enough to satisfy any lover of the supernatural. The two figures, however, who were leaning against the iron railing that led up to the front door did not in the least seem to mind, for they were engaged in a most animated conversation. One of them was tall and lean, the other short and dumpy.

"There he is," Shakespeare said, "and I might have known it! My melancholy Dane."



HAMLET WAS SOLILOQUIZING TO THE MALADE IMAGINAIRE AND WAS APPARENTLY FAILING TO AMUSE HIM



MASTER SHAKESPEARE SPOKE A FEW PLEASANT WORDS ABOUT HIS  
DISTINGUISHED COLLEAGUE, SEÑOR CERVANTES



(Erasmus was in the thick of the fray when that point was reached and was enjoying himself right heartily). They compared the honesty of their respective publishers, the generosity of their erstwhile patrons, and the fickleness of the public. They paid their respects to their audiences in the theatre, and what they had to say upon these subjects sounded exactly as if a group of modern composers and playwrights had been drinking tea in one of the Russian *trakteers* along West Fifty-seventh Street, indulging in the same pastime.

In the end, they even went into details about type and paper and bindings. In short, they thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and we—Frits and I, mere innocent bystanders—were so fascinated by their conversation that neither of us took the precaution to watch the clock. Midnight therefore took all of us by surprise. Among ordinary mortals, this might have caused a panic. But our guests were not of this world. They silently slipped back into that twilight in which they now had their being, and Frits and I were left alone with our memories.

Just before I went home, Hein came in with a slip of paper.

“Two bottles of wine,” he said, “and nine bottles of ale.”

“Save that piece of paper,” Frits told him. “Some young man can now get his Ph.D. writing a dissertation upon the subject of Shakespeare’s attitude towards alcohol.”

“Sorry,” Hein answered, “but I need it to check up on the fellow in the inn.”

I had to agree that on the whole that seemed a better and surely a more practical plan.

people who more or less share the same general point of view, at least as regards the essentials of life and thought. Otherwise, both sides will be too much on their guard to speak freely. They will spar for conversational advantages. They will do their best to trip each other up on insignificant details.

"I don't think, however, that I can lay down any hard and fast rules. It will depend so completely upon the temperament of your guests. If they happen to have been brought up in the old school of what in my day we used to call 'gentlemen,' they will be like well-trained fencers who are engaged in mortal combat, but who, even then, will carefully observe all the rules of the game. If, on the other hand, they have never been taught to respect anybody else's opinions but have been told to think only of themselves and feel convinced that they must always be right and that everybody else therefore must invariably be wrong—in that case, I would most strongly urge you to avoid bringing together whom God in His wisdom has put asunder. But, if you will pardon my preaching a little, all of us can learn only from our own experience. So why don't you try both systems? Why don't you sometimes invite only congenial souls who will agree on the main points and then again, once in a while, just to see how it works, risk a meeting between the other kind?"

"That is rather what we ourselves had thought, too," Frits answered, "but we wanted to know how you felt about it."

"I have now told you, but may I remind you of one thing?"

"Of course, sir," Frits said, dropping the rather official "Doctor" for the more familiar "Mynheer." "What is it that you want to remind us of?"

"That the initiative for these somewhat extraordinary dinner-parties lies with you and must always remain in your hands. As I remember, there were no restrictions placed upon your choice. You were given complete freedom of action, and I am afraid that you will have to observe that rule to the end. I shall, of course, always be delighted to be present. You have no idea how starved I was for a little good conversation, and our daily fare (though, of course, I should not complain) was apt to grow a bit monotonous, whereas your cook—a most estimable woman, too—is a true artist. The things she can do to a chicken" (I made a hasty mental note of this little aside) "are both wondrous and marvellous. But I can only come to you in the quality of a guest. I must have no voice in telling you whom you should ask."

We stayed a while longer, then excused ourselves, returned to Frits' house for our eleven-o'clock cup of coffee (an ancient and most agreeable Dutch institution), and then sat down to the difficult task of arranging our next Saturday's dinner.

"Is that old encyclopedia of yours still in your bedroom?" I asked. He told me it was, so I went upstairs and came down with the volume M-N. "Here it is," I told him, but I was mistaken. I should have brought the volume A-B, for the famous controversy was mentioned in connexion with the name of Arius, the African theologian of the early half of the fourth century, who became a priest in Alexandria and there developed that strange and obscure heresy which, in one disguise or another, has survived until to-day.

What were the principles involved?

I had often tried to understand them, but I had always failed, and so I decided to read Frits the whole part of the article that had to do with the famous controversy.

"Finally," so it said, "the controversy about Arius' heresy assumed such proportions that it reached the ears of the emperor in Constantinople. Now to be emperor of the whole empire, Constantine saw in one undivided Catholic Church the best means of counteracting the vast movement within his widespread realm towards disintegration, and he at once recognized how dangerous strife might prove to its unity. Constantine had no understanding of the questions at issue, and so no course was left him but to summon a General, or Œcumenical, Council, which was convened at Nicæa in the year 325, and it was there that the problem of homoiousia and homousia was thoroughly discussed and was decided against Arius (the champion of homoiousia), who was thereupon anathematized by the Council and banished to Illyria."

Here Frits interrupted me. "Wait a moment, please," he begged, "and never mind Arius, but what did the two words mean? That is what I want to know."

"Have you *Webster's Dictionary* here?" I asked.

"No."

"Then come home with me—it's about time for luncheon, anyway—and I'll read the definitions to you out of Webster."

We went home, and this is what old Noah told us:

**Homoousian:** Holding, in accordance with the Nicene Creed, that the Son of God is consubstantial—that is, of the same essence or substance with the Father.

As for **Homoiousian**, it got the following definition:

One of the large body of fourth-century conservatives who shrank from affirming that the Son is identical in essence with God the Father, but were willing to say that the Son is 'essentially like' the Father, or 'like the Father in all respects.'

I closed Webster's mighty tome and said, "Now, is it clear to you?"

"Fine! Go ahead and ask them. I will be there. But what, for goodness' sake, are we going to feed them on? What did they eat in Asia Minor in the year three hundred and so much?"

"I've already thought of that. They were simple country folk. We will probably have to invite a couple of bishops, but that means nothing. They, too, must have come from some small mountain village in Asia Minor or Armenia or from the Egyptian desert. I figured it all out, and here is the menu."

Frits took the piece of paper on which I had jotted down an outline of our meal.

He read it and shuddered. "A plate of barley water without salt—roast mutton done in garlic. No vegetables, but a lot of olives on the side and some sort of corn bread. We might try that recipe for Thomas Jefferson's spoon bread which Rita Bonsal gave me. And a light Greek wine mixed with rosin."

"Terrible!" Frits said, giving me back my slip of paper. "Do you mind if I have something else before we sit down to the formal meal?"

"Not in the least. I'd already made up my own mind to do the same thing."

"Well, in that case, here is luck to your little experiment, but how about Erasmus? He's so fussy about what he can eat and what he can't. Hadn't we better warn him, too?"

"Of course, the poor old dear, but that too has been arranged. Lucie has promised to fry us one of her Dutch steaks and prepare some fresh asparagus. She told me to invite you and Jimmie, too. Dinner in her studio at six sharp."

"Will Erasmus come when he knows that two ladies will be present?"

"Why not? He is for ever telling me about the lovely young girls he used to meet at Thomas More's house."

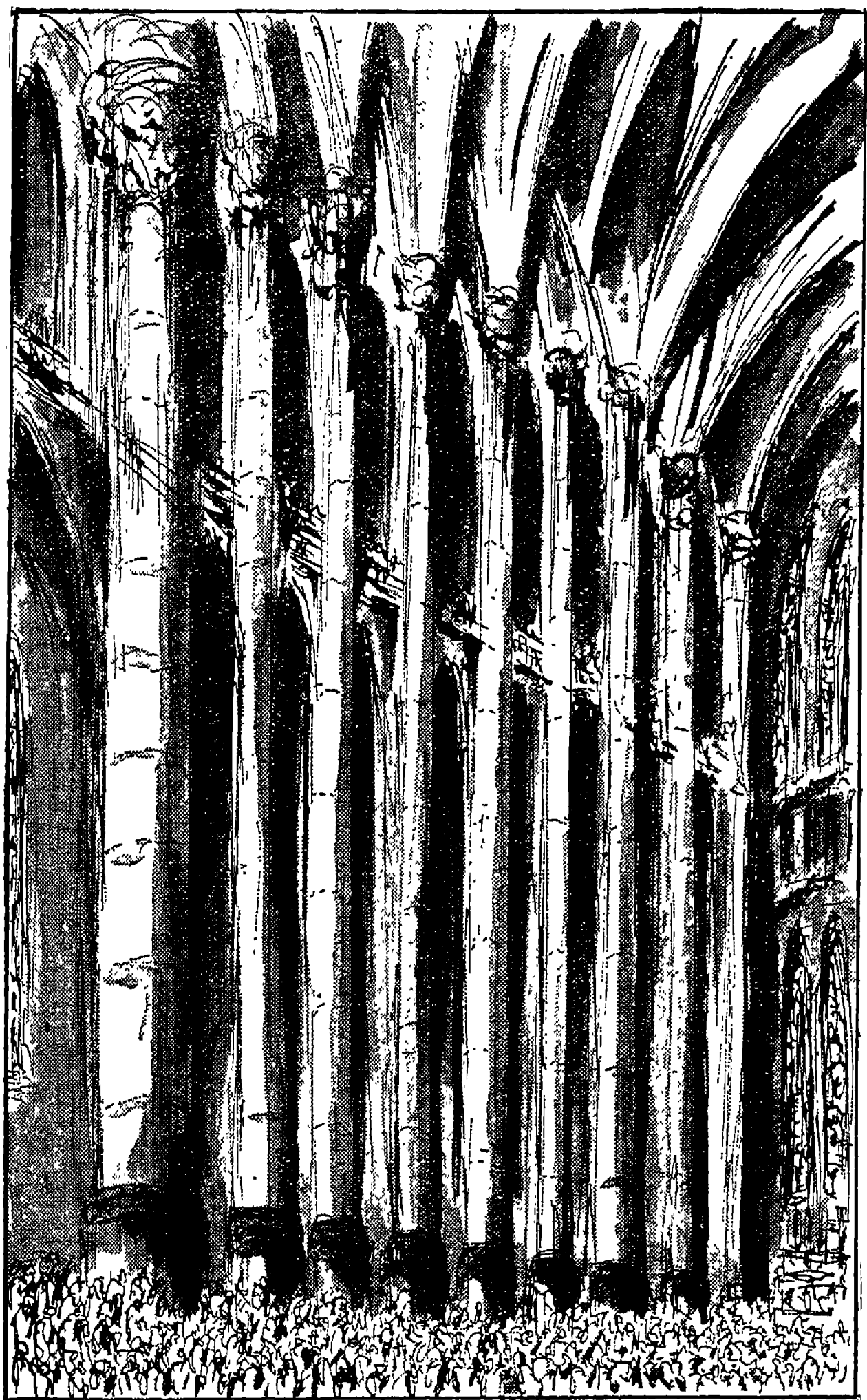
"That was four hundred years ago. Since then a great many things have happened."

"Anyway, we can try."

"Of course we can."

At that moment Kaatje came in to say that luncheon was ready, and we went to the dining-room at the back of the house where Jimmie had been busy making a cream sauce for a dish of fresh shrimps. Lucie had dropped in too. She told me that that morning her cat had presented her with its fourteenth litter of kittens since she had taken the creature in, and that she had saved one for us—almost white but with a brown nose and a little shock of brown hair on the top of its head. "Looking," as she explained, "exactly like the youngest of the Fratellinis."

"When can we have it?" Jimmie asked.



VEERE'S CHURCH AS IT HAD BEEN IN THE HAPPIER DAYS OF ITS YOUTH

about a personal God and His only begotten Son and a lot of other things I completely fail to understand.

I listen to all of them as patiently as I can, but I prefer to stick to the philosophy of life I have distilled for myself out of my own experiences and out of what I have read these last twenty years. I don't doubt that in another twenty thousand years we shall have gathered enough facts to let us catch a glimpse of a few of the laws of history. But until then we may as well confess that we shall have to 'guess,' and, in order to guess rightly (or as rightly as possible), I want to be able to walk around my historical figures—to get at them in as personal a way as possible, as we have been doing these last few weeks with those people who were our guests.

So please just give me your own opinion rather than the mere facts. You save yourself a lot of time and I will get much more out of it.

Tell Jimmie I have looked all over Amsterdam to get her some cat-mint for her kitten, but I can't find the stuff. Perhaps Dutch cats drink gin when they want to go on a spree. But of course in America, where you have had prohibition, they must have found some other way to get a jag. That's not bad for a foreigner who has never been in America, is it?

Stay in Veere another year, and I will speak your language as well as if I had been born in the States.

My love to Jimmie and Lucie, and tell Hein Verlinde that I found a kind of rope that is twice as tough as steel wire. The next time I come down in the car I will bring him about twenty metres so that he can try it out.

Yours as ever,  
F. P.

To which right away I made the following reply :

MY DEAR FRITS,

Thank you and thank you a lot for your letter. I have relayed your message to Hein Verlinde. He gets a little bored playing those records upstairs, and as a reward he deserves something that is of some practical use to him in his own job.

As for the contents, etc., etc., I feel very much flattered that you see things so completely the way I do. I am quite conscious of the rather low esteem in which the professional historians hold the work of those who, like myself, try to bring the story of the past to the masses of our fellow-countrymen in such a way that they will not only read what we write but also may derive a few lessons from the past that will prevent them from repeating at least a few of those mistakes which caused such terrific suffering among their ancestors.

Whether this can be done or not, I am sorry but I cannot possibly tell you. Often I despair of the human race ever learning anything at all from experience. It is very eager to do so within the realm of the

unless the good politics and the good music and the good manners and the good everything else are for ever watched over and protected by those who intend that the good shall prevail over the bad.

But it is terribly difficult, as I have found out, to convince most of my neighbours on the American side of the ocean of the necessity of modifying their optimism about evolution by a dash of that much less palatable tincture brewed by old Sir Thomas Gresham. They are busy making a living and claim that they have no extra time to waste upon such difficult problems. In which they resemble a certain type of our business-men who never can go to a doctor for a look-over, and then drop dead some fine day from an affliction which, if detected in time, could have been relieved with no trouble at all.

I shall, however, go right on doing what I have done these last thirty years. And perhaps a hundred years from now some one will begin to suspect what I have been driving at all this time.

Take these two men we have invited for next Saturday. They represent two rather abstruse ideas which, as far as I can discover, no one as yet has been quite able to understand or even to define. If you study the proceedings of the Council of Nicæa itself (it lasted from May 20 to July 25 of the year 325), you begin to suspect that the vast majority of the delegates had sense enough to realize that, as they were dealing with words and not with concrete facts, they would never be able to reach a definite conclusion. They suggested all kinds of middle-of-the-road compromises. But such middle-of-the-road compromises were the last thing the fanatics from the extreme right and from the extreme left wished to see adopted. They had grown drunk on the sound of their own eloquence and insisted that the council call black black, and white white, and cease to bother about those intermediary colours which are the common colours of our universe, in which very few things are either entirely black or entirely white. And, unfortunately, on such occasions it is always the most uncompromising fanatic who will win, because the matter under discussion means infinitely more to him than it does to the middle-of-the-road liberal.

In Nicæa, the Homousians were just a little more violent than those who favoured homoiousia (wait a moment, I must look it up again, for I never can remember), and so that extra letter *i* was rejected. All those who remained faithful to their little *iota* lost their jobs. They were denounced as heretics and were proscribed by the official Church and they either died in exile or wandered about in the deserts of Africa and eastern Asia, and there they and their followers continued to exist for another couple of centuries, fighting hopelessly but bravely for a cause which no one had ever quite understood and which no one could ever hope to understand.

Had this been the only instance of such a useless and futile quarrel, we could easily have overlooked it. We could have told ourselves that the sort of people who then dominated the Church were men of little

And now, I am sorry to say, I have to report one of the most absurd and grotesque and also most unpleasant incidents that ever happened to me. Saturday came, and Frits arrived at the appointed hour. Lucie had given us a fine meal, and at half-past six we were ready to receive our guests.

Erasmus arrived at a quarter to seven and gratefully warmed himself before the open fire. We had, in the end, refrained from asking him to join us at Lucie's, as he had always insisted upon being kept in ignorance about the preliminaries of our dinner-parties. Then the clock struck seven, and there was the usual knock at the door. But instead of both our visitors showing up at the same time as we had expected, there was only one of them. He told us that he was the Archbishop of Bithynia. He spoke very little Latin, but Erasmus knew enough Greek to put him at his ease, though our guest at once informed him that his accent was abominable and that he had probably learned his Greek from one of those heretics who, after the Council of Nicæa, had fled to western Europe to eke out an existence as a teacher of the Hellenic tongue.

Then there was another knock at the door, and I got up to open it to one of the hairiest creatures I had ever seen. In very bad Latin he announced that it was his duty to be where he was that evening—he had not wanted to come at all—but since he had been formally ordered to put in an appearance, he was where he was and hoped that he would not be obliged to stay too long.

I asked Erasmus to explain to His Grace how happy we were to see him and introduced Frits to him and then remarked courteously that he undoubtedly remembered his old colleague from Nicæa.

"I remember him only too well," he answered and, picking up a handful of olives from the table and stuffing them into his mouth, he asked, "Why am I here, and what is the meaning of all this?"

Erasmus explained as best he could that we had craved the pleasure and honour of this meeting because we hoped that we might learn something from him that evening.

"If these people want to learn something to-night," His Grace snapped back, "then why did they invite that ignoramus over there?"

Most of this remark was fortunately lost in the noise of a stack of plates being dropped in the kitchen. "I'm awfully sorry that I was so clumsy," Jo explained to us afterwards, "but just when I had those plates in my hands to put them into the stove and warm them, I saw the bald-headed fellow scratch himself with one of your forks, and the face he made was too much for me."

Well, to make a pretty long story as short as possible, that is the way it went during the rest of the evening, only there was not much of a rest





THE HOLY MEN OF NICEA AT ONCE GOT INTO A SLIGHT ARGUMENT



THE STRONG ARM OF THE LAW WAS OBLIGED TO CONDUCT THE TWO  
HOLY MEN TO THE TOWN GAOL

## CHAPTER VII

### We Invite Two Guests of a Very Different Sort, and DESCARTES and EMERSON Come to Make Us Forget Our Visitors of the Week Before

QUITE as we had expected, Lucie and Jimmie were delighted when, the next day at luncheon, we gave a circumstantial account of what had happened the previous evening. But their hilarity did not decide the problem that faced us: whom should we invite next?

It was Lucie who gave us the hint that led to one of the most delightful evenings of that interesting year. "Why," she asked us, "don't you, by way of contrast, invite one of the most logical brains of all times?"

"Whom do you mean?" Frits asked her.

"A Frenchman, a certain Monsieur Descartes."

"A wonderful idea!" we both agreed, and that same evening the name of René Descartes, carefully spelled out on the usual slip of paper, was placed underneath the stone lion of the town hall, and I was refreshing my memory upon the subject of Cartesianism.

But while looking for a French life of Descartes, which I knew must be somewhere in my library, I happened upon a collection of Emerson's *Essays*, and that gave me a thought. Both Frits and I were a little wary of inviting a single guest. It had worked in the case of Erasmus, but would we ever find another Erasmus? So why not ask Emerson, in addition to Descartes? He knew enough French to be able to converse with Descartes, and both of them were gentlemen. Even if they disagreed, they would hardly behave in the way the two holy men from Nicæa had done. I therefore wrote the name of Ralph Waldo Emerson on another slip of paper, took my bicycle, went back to the town hall, and left it in the usual hiding-place. I noticed, by the way, that the slip of paper bearing the name of René Descartes was already gone.

After I had got back home I decided that I had better attend to our menu immediately, for though Descartes had spent twenty-one years in Holland, he had always remained most aggressively French, and I knew that he would be a connoisseur of both wines and food. As for Emerson, he was easy when it came to satisfy his tastes. He was a New Englander and had undoubtedly been brought up in the appalling doctrine that you must never notice what you eat.

Our soup would be *consommé de volaille aux laitues farcies*—a stock of bouillon with braised lettuce, cut in halves, cooked some ten minutes

Emerson, he was polite, but his praise of Johann Sebastian reminded me of General Grant, who, after having heard Jenny Lind sing, remarked that she undoubtedly must be "a very good woman."

I will confess that Emerson's apparent lack of any kind of musical understanding did not in the least surprise me. The atmosphere in which he had grown up had hardly encouraged him to take a serious interest in anything as exciting as the works of Johann Sebastian Bach. He was, however, very patient with us, and we from our side were very careful not to expose him to anything that might have caused acute suffering to one brought up on hymns and whatever went by the name of music in the Boston of the first half of the last century.

Here is the outline of the life of René Descartes I wrote for Frits to refresh his memory.

Little René was born in the year 1596 in a small village in Touraine. His grandfather had been a physician and had married the daughter of a physician. Young René therefore came quite naturally by his love of science. But his father, Joachim Descartes, had preferred a legal career and had (according to age-old French tradition) married the daughter of another high law officer. After the death of his first wife, Descartes *père* had married again and had moved to Brittany, and it was in Brittany that René had spent most of his youth.

Meanwhile his father had obtained an office which automatically made him a member of the lower nobility. That was a matter of routine in the France of the monarchy but it meant a lot to young René. He never forgot what he owed to his rank. No one ever lived who so diligently and so honestly tried to bestow a knowledge of the truth upon his fellow-men, but there was nothing personal in all this. Descartes was like certain doctors I have known who spent all their lives in research and who not infrequently made discoveries which proved to be of the greatest benefit to their fellow-men. But nothing would enrage them quite as much as being reminded of the rôle they played as the good Samaritans of the human race. It was not the human race which interested them. It was the behaviour of a certain kind of microbe which exasperated them, and they were out to get that microbe and destroy it, and that the human race was the gainer by their labours was a matter of complete indifference to them.

Nor was this in any way a pose on their part. They were entirely sincere in their attitude of aloofness from all human emotions, and that was perhaps what made them such excellent research men. They would not have been tolerated more than five minutes in a hospital ward, but in a laboratory they were magnificent. René Descartes rather belonged

of the pupils of Maurice of Nassau, who was then in Brabant, preparing for further campaigns in the southern Netherlands. What curious times those were! In spite of all its bitter religious wars, Europe still enjoyed that 'unity of civilization' which had been born of the medieval conceptions about a political and a religious super-empire. Another century and a half were to go by before an exaggerated notion of nationalism was to divide the countries of the Continent into those hostile little nations, each one of which tried to develop a civilization and culture of its own as opposed to the civilization and culture of its neighbours. But when Descartes was born, it made little difference whether one's cradle stood in Stockholm or Naples, in Vienna or Madrid, in London or Amsterdam. Not only were you a Swede or an Italian or a Spaniard or an Austrian or a Dutchman, but you also *ipso facto* were the member of a sort of super-national club, for which you qualified by having been born of fairly honourable parents, by having enjoyed a reasonably sound education, by speaking a sufficient amount of Latin to make yourself understood by your fellow-members, by having enough respect for your own habits, customs, and prejudices to be willing to let others enjoy the same privileges without trying to reform them.

This, of course, was a thoroughly undemocratic arrangement, but it had existed for so long and it was so completely a part of the accepted order of things that nobody took offence or felt the need of another system, which could have opened the doors of their club to anyone, regardless of the fact that he might be highly unwelcome to those who already occupied the premises.

Let me give you René Descartes as Exhibit A1. He is born a French Catholic, but is serving under a German Protestant prince who is the head of an army of Dutchmen. As soon as he has reached headquarters, he finds himself a member of a happy international company of military students, gathered together from every corner of Europe that they may study their strategy at first hand and with the best of all teachers. In order to while away the tedious hours of garrison duty, these young men engage in mathematical contests and offer prizes for the best solution of a given problem.

One day young Descartes, trying to figure out a problem which had been posted on a church door but which happened to have been written in Dutch, asks a stranger to translate it for him in either French or Latin. The stranger obliges, for he himself is a mathematician and doubts very much whether this young man can make head or tail of the puzzle that has proved too much for the best brains of the army. Early the next day Descartes brings him the solution. Naturally, the two become fast friends, and the French cadet goes to the city of Dordrecht to spend some

was still where it used to be. They came back and reported that it was gone. After that, who dared doubt the authenticity of this miracle? Certainly not René Descartes, the famous mathematician, although in the practice of his trade he must have known that it would have taken uncommonly strong angels to carry so much masonry (the house was built of solid stone, twenty-eight feet by twelve and a half feet wide and thirteen and a half feet high) all the way from Palestine to Italy, and that in only a couple of hours.

A moment ago I mentioned Ulm. Descartes studied there together with a mathematical friend who was also a devout Rosicrucian. It may have been his close association with one who was deeply lost in the occult contemplations of the Rosicrucian faith which caused him to fall victim to a very serious attack of melancholia. Or it may have been the gloom of this ancient fortress on the Danube. Or again, he may have been upset by the consciousness that he was on the point of making a discovery which would ultimately change the very basis of all science. For he suspected that the methods he had laid down for the study of analytical geometry might also be applied to every other department of mathematics, and mathematics to him meant the beginning and end of all creation. A little more light upon the subject, and he would stand forth as the founder of a new world of the intellect. But the light he prayed for came in the form of three dreams which had nothing to do with science.

In the first one he saw himself walking down a lonely country lane and he had grown lame when a storm broke loose, and he was obliged to find shelter in a church. In dream number two, which was more or less of a continuation of the first one, he heard terrific claps of thunder while his own body was giving off sparks of fire. In dream number three he happened to open a volume of Decimus Magnus Ausonius, the author of a charming and idyllic voyage down the Moselle river, a little book which does for that river what Smetana's tone poem does for the Moldau. The first line that struck his eye read as follows: "What way of life shall I now follow?"

When Ausonius wrote down these words, they may have meant almost anything at all, but it most certainly had no reference to his immortal soul, for this fourth-century Roman poet was so little of a Christian that he insulted his converted neighbours by presenting them with an ode bearing the outrageous title of *Cupid Crucified*. Of course, Descartes probably did not know this, but had he done so, it would have made very little difference, in view of the mood in which he happened to be when attracted by that line. He was well within his twenties. Thus far, although he had been a faithful student of many branches of learning, he had not really accomplished anything of lasting value. The question that faced him was—what way of life should he now follow?



THE OLD DUTCH CITIES HAD THAT QUIET DIGNITY WHICH THE  
PHILOSOPHERS CRAVED

just as no sensible person in the days of Columbus any longer believed that the world was flat. It was, however, one thing to be firmly convinced of the truth of a fact but something quite different again to say so in public. And now Signor Galileo was in trouble for a new and even more dangerous scientific heresy. Would his fellow-mathematicians and astronomers come forward and boldly defy the established clerical authorities by taking his side?

Only a few of them did so, and I am sorry to say that Descartes was not among those few, although he was in an almost ideal position to act as the champion of a new idea. He was financially independent and as long as he remained in the Low Countries no one could touch him. The Estates-General were very jealous of their authority, and it is a matter of record that not a single refugee who had invoked the hospitality of their country was ever surrendered to the Pope, the emperor, or the Inquisition. These foreign guests were supposed to refrain from getting themselves mixed up with local politics. As long as they observed that very simple rule they were safe, and they knew it.

But when Descartes was obliged to make his choice and was forced to make up his mind whether he would declare himself on the side of Galileo, who was now in the 'protective custody' (as we would call it to-day) of the Inquisition, or against him, he refrained from taking a definite stand and he was even more careful than before to cast his ideas in such a form that nothing he wrote could possibly be construed as being in direct contradiction of the first chapter of Genesis.

This strikes us as unworthy of so great a man, but perhaps he had his reasons. He had a purpose in life, a purpose greater than himself, greater than everything else. He intended to reduce all he knew to a single volume which was to bear the modest title of *The World* and which, as he had planned it originally, was to accept the Copernican theory as an established fact and as the basis of all his further astronomical theories. The volume, in its original conception, was never finished. It is therefore impossible for us to know whether he would actually have had the courage to defy the Church or would again have looked for some kind of compromise. But this much is certain—he meant to write such a book and in it he intended to give the world his final opinion upon all the burning questions of the day. And we had better let it go at that.

Meanwhile, he was beginning to suffer from his old complaint. There were too many people around him to let him work in peace. Once more he packed his few belongings and this time he moved to Utrecht, where one of his pupils held a professorate at the university.

There, however, he was to discover that when it came to 'heresy snooping,' the Protestants were just as much on the job as the Catholics. Not





AMONG THOSE FLAT MEADOWS DESCARTES COULD BOTH FISH  
AND MEDITATE

highly suspicious, didn't it? Besides, hadn't I openly bragged of my familiarity with a great many other foreign tongues? Why had I bothered to learn these if I had not planned to avail myself of them when the time had come to study the dangerous revolutionary isms that were then being evolved in half a dozen European nations?

"Preposterous!" you will say. Of course it was, but no more absurd than the idiot who wrote to the Department of Justice, explaining that he had heard me click my heels while bowing to a lady. Question: Why did I click my heels when bowing to a lady? Answer: It was an entirely unconscious act, the result of having spent five years in Germany and Austria.

"Ah, you see! He confesses that he has spent five years in Germany and Austria? And why did you spend five years in Germany and Austria?"

"Because I wanted to teach in an American university, and thirty-five years ago you could not get a job unless you had a German Ph.D."

"Perhaps so, but it still sounds highly irregular. He owns a Russian dictionary and has spent five years at a German university. We had better keep him under close supervision."

And as a result of my heel-clicking and my juvenile ambitions to be taken for a great linguist, I was for quite a long while hunted like a dangerous criminal, though few people surely had been so consistent in their dislike of the unholy Teuton as I. The only difference between me and my inquisitors, as far as I could see, was this—that whereas I was able to fight the Germans rather intelligently because I had taken the trouble to learn their language and to understand their queer psychological make-up, these other self-appointed saviours of the Republic were obliged to get their information from the spy stories in our popular magazines and the works of "Treat 'Em Rough" Guy Empey.

I am afraid that in this respect very little has changed since the days of Descartes. This Frenchman, going his own way, politely but adamantly refusing to associate with any of his neighbours, keeping his opinions strictly to himself, receiving no callers yet for ever getting letters from all sorts of people with famous names—no, he could not possibly be what he pretended to be. He must be up to some sinister, deeply laid plot. It was dangerous to attack him openly, for apparently he enjoyed the protection of some very influential personages. He had been seen at the court of the Prince of Orange at The Hague and for a while, so it was said, he had even tutored the children of King Frederick V of Bohemia, who, after the loss of his German and Bohemian possessions, had found an asylum in the Low Countries.

Descartes therefore was too well entrenched to be disposed of by the usual methods of innuendo and insinuation. The assault against him

must be carefully planned, and it must be made by some one who could not be dismissed as merely another small-town divine with a personal grievance. Such a person was found in 1639. His name was Voetius (born Gysbert Voet), and he was the rector of the University of Utrecht. He used the indirect method to make his attack. The death of one of his fellow-professors gave him his opportunity. In his funeral oration the speaker mentioned that during his lifetime the departed had been honoured with the friendship of the great Monsieur René Descartes. Of course, the man in question was dead and beyond the reach of criticism, but perhaps there were others among his colleagues, still very much alive, who were also in correspondence with this foreign Catholic in whose *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting Our Reason* the author was said to have stated that all the learning he had so far acquired, instead of showing him the road to the truth, had merely filled his mind with doubt, wherefore he felt compelled to suggest an entirely new approach to wisdom—an approach which would teach the pupil not to trust anything found in the books of others but to depend entirely upon what he himself could observe with his own senses. There (so he hinted) you had the nigger of heresy in the wood-pile of the revealed faith. The *clara perceptio*, which was Monsieur Descartes' strong point and which, translated into plain language, meant nothing more or less than that "seeing is believing" and which insisted that all knowledge must be founded upon personal investigation and experimentation, was really nothing but an appeal to doubt.

Such a point of view was in flat contradiction to the accepted philosophy of the times, which still stuck to the good old nursery discipline represented by the two famous lines:

"Papa, why is two times two four?"

"Because Papa says so."

Those who had ears to hear knew what the learned Professor Voetius meant. Monsieur Descartes had been publicly denounced as an enemy of the Christian faith.

I am glad to report that once again the heresy snoopers failed in their attempt to dispose of their enemy. After they had summoned Descartes to appear before a council of professors to try him on his doctrines and after he had refused to do so and had thereupon been condemned by default, pressure was brought to bear upon the Utrecht faculty by the authorities in The Hague. They let it be known that Monsieur Descartes was a very great friend of theirs and must not be exposed to any further annoyance.

After that, the Frenchman was allowed to think and write as he pleased and could give himself wholeheartedly to his self-appointed task of trying

to discover whether all the problems of heaven and earth and of life and death could actually be reduced to a few definite laws based upon reason and revealed by personal investigation rather than upon the authority of a few ancient prophets and half a dozen old books.

Three times during the twenty years he spent in Holland Descartes paid short visits to his native land. The first time he went there in connexion with that very small property which provided him with the leisure every good philosopher needs, for, as Emerson was to observe a little later, "The man of thought should not dig ditches." On the last occasion he had gone to Paris to inquire into the possibility of being appointed to a post in the local university. But he reached the French capital at the very moment the French nobles, exasperated at being a little too drastically 'centralized' by Cardinal Richelieu and by his successor, Cardinal Mazarin, were on the point of getting involved in a civil war of their own.

Being above all things a man of peace (in spite of his career as a soldier), Descartes had not waited for the fighting to begin but had hastened back to Holland. After this last adventure, however, he began to show signs of increasing restlessness. In spite of the failure of all the attacks that had been launched on his doctrines of the desirability of doubt (*De omnibus dubitandis*), he no longer felt entirely at ease among his Dutch neighbours. And though nothing was done to disturb him in mind or body, he realized that this particular chapter in his life was drawing near its close. When in the year 1649 he received a most flattering offer from the Queen of Sweden, requesting the distinguished Monsieur Descartes to move to her own country and initiate her Majesty into the principles of higher mathematics, he decided to accept.

This was not the first time he had been urged to leave the Low Countries and betake himself to Stockholm, but until then he had always refused. What was generally known about the daughter of the great Gustavus Adolphus did not paint that lady in very rosy colours. She was said to be possessed of a decidedly masculine brain and to be very bright, but in a great many other respects she was reported to be decidedly queer. (Report correct. H. v. L.) She was, however, a *bona fide* queen, and in the middle of the seventeenth century the protection of a royal majesty was nothing to be dismissed airily by a professional philosopher who was said to hold some very extraordinary opinions within the realm of religion.

In September of the year 1649 René Descartes caught his last glimpse of the coast of Holland. After a tempestuous voyage on board one of her Majesty's ships of the line (sent specially to call for the famous philosopher), he safely reached Sweden and proceeded to the royal residence. He soon became aware that everything was not entirely as he had been made to anticipate. Queen Christina did not intend to hide her famous

nature by the Cartesian method of direct and personal observation used to surround himself with stuffed crocodiles (gruesomely suspended from the ceiling) and stuffed turtles hanging from the walls, and on cold winter evenings, when he knew that his house was being watched by his neighbours, he would drop an occasional handful of copper filings on the fire. This would then cause strange lights to arise from the chimney, and the frightened crowd of onlookers would hastily take to its heels. The learned man inside, so they shouted to each other as they ran, was in cahoots with the devil. Better leave him alone! And the learned man could thereupon return to his anatomical dissections or to his mathematical studies, safe for another year or so, when the Inquisition might hear about the spooky manifestations that had taken place near his home. After that, the thumbscrew could easily make him confess anything his judges wanted to hear—and that was the end.

During the seventeenth century the world had advanced a little. The crude old methods of concealment were no longer necessary, but a diffuse style, hiding all the more dangerous parts of the text from the ordinary reader, was still a useful asset if one wanted to end one's life peacefully in one's own bed. Wherefore, as far as I am concerned, a Chinese grammar makes easier reading than the average treatise on philosophy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

I can, however, get a fairly clear concept (we are back at the *clara perceptio* of Descartes) of what those pioneers of the intellect tried to prove, and as a result I understand why Descartes should have been so successful and why, at the same time, his doctrines should have caused such a panic among those who held that the world had reached a point at which there was nothing more to be discussed and nothing further either to be doubted or to be proved.

(This demand for a static universe is as old as the human race, and I am sure that the cave-dwellers were already in the habit of killing those of their neighbours who doubted the desirability of living in wet and draughty caverns and who insisted that a hut made out of clay and reeds would not only offer better resistance to rain and sun, but would also be a much more healthful place of abode for the children and the old folks.)

You may have noticed that I am stalling a bit, for the moment will soon come when I shall have to jump right in and tell you what Cartesianism (as the whole system of Descartes' philosophy came to be known) has done for me.

For one thing, it has taught me to respect man's intellect as the beginning and the end of all progress, and that progress is something that can be achieved by our own deliberate efforts as soon as we shall have the courage

of a sea-urchin or a poison-ivy plant would make very interesting reading. Nevertheless, wherever there is a living spark, there is also a soul—a certain consciousness of existence with needs and desires and aspirations of its own. And as everything created by God bears the breath of life in it, no dog or cat or fish is a mere automatic something which ticks like a watch and strikes the hour like a clock, without knowing what it is doing.

This Descartes never even seems to have suspected. Had he done so, he would not have hit upon that, to me, slightly absurd maxim of *Cogito, ergo sum*, or “I think; therefore I am.” For while there is no serious argument against this statement, it is really no more satisfactory in explaining the riddle of existence than Schopenhauer’s equally cryptic *Volo, ergo sum*: “I will; therefore I am.” For granted that thinking or willing are the proof of existing, then why not go just one step farther and say that thinking is merely the proof of my ability to think and has nothing to do with my existing?

But enough of all this, for I am not very clever when it comes to solving that kind of philosophical crossword puzzle. The only thing I ask while burning the midnight oil with Spinoza or Descartes or Kant or Nietzsche is this: what can this man give me to help me go through life with a maximum of usefulness to myself and my neighbours and a minimum of friction with my own conscience?

I will humbly give Descartes thanks for the tremendous service he rendered unto mankind by insisting that—in the affairs of the physical world at least—only seeing is believing. I omit reference to the spiritual world, for that lies beyond my sphere of interest and observation.

I realize, of course, that there are many people who made Descartes their only guide (as there are others who accepted Spinoza as their sole guide) and who have followed him patiently to those sublime heights to which all great philosophies must eventually lead. I fear, however, that there are only a few among us mortals who can hope to travel so far and return to tell the tale, for it is very lonely among those snow-covered peaks. The air is hard to breathe. The silence is frightening, and a single false step on that icy plateau, and one is lost for ever. Being people of the plains, you and I, my dear Frits, we can only indulge in an occasional visit to the Cartesian Alps, just as once in a while we may decide to go to the Swiss mountains for a bit of exercise and a change of air and then will hasten back to our own mud flats, refreshed and invigorated and ready to pick up our humdrum daily existence where we had left off, but happy that we are back among our own familiar surroundings.

Far different is the story I shall now tell you about that kindly, simple, and lovable soul, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who, as far as I am concerned,

during the seventeenth century. Holland had its share of Unitarianism during this same period. In England the Act of Uniformity of the year 1662 caused two thousand clergymen with Unitarian leanings to lose their offices. But this outrageous and unfair treatment became the very reason for their existence as a definitely recognized new denomination. For the victims of this purge were now forced to combine that they might let the world know where they stood in regard to the Trinitarian idea which still dominated the minds of most people.

The Unitarians wholly rejected the old Calvinistic and Lutheran doctrines of salvation, inherent guilt, and eternal punishment. They even began, at least to a certain extent, to lose faith in the Bible as the only book that could show mankind how to live noble and decent lives. They began to suggest that other works, or parts of other works (say the last chapter of *A Tale of Two Cities*), might reveal the inherent divinity of the human soul quite as correctly as many of the stories in the Old Testament.

Let me, as a matter of personal pride, say that the much-abused old Harvard became, very early during its career, a veritable stronghold of Unitarianism, translating the *Veritas* of its college seal into "Prove all things and hold fast to that which has proved true." And—what is much more to the point—it has steadfastly tried to live up to this idea, for which it deserves the gratitude of the whole of the Republic.

The backwoods divines of New England had, of course, greatly disapproved of this new heresy. They denounced the Unitarians as libertines, and when Joseph Priestley went over from England in 1794 to found the first Unitarian congregation in the New World, he was received with all that lack of warmth and cordiality for which New England has gained such a sad renown. The good dominies need not have worried. Unitarianism will never be a mass religion. From a purely numerical point of view, the Unitarian Church has been an out-and-out failure, for even to-day there are fewer than 150,000 Unitarians in the whole of the United States.

Religion, fortunately, is not like pig-iron or peanuts. It can be definitely expressed in mathematical terms, but such terms mean nothing in matters of the spirit. If, however, you want to know what influence Unitarianism has exercised upon the civilization of which it is a part, look at the number of Unitarians you will find in such books as *Who's Who in America*. You will then discover that an amazing proportion of the staff work of our army of progress is being done by people who in some direct or indirect way are proud to associate themselves with the Unitarian movement.

And now, back to Ralph Waldo Emerson, about whom I can be very brief, for his life was as placid as that river along the banks of which he

opinions of Albert Einstein as to those of the charwoman who keeps his classroom clean.

I therefore like Emerson for having said what he did upon the subject of the Representative Man (good old New England understatement!), and I hope he will tell us something more about his ideas upon the subject when we see him. In one of his books (I am quoting from memory) he defines the great man as the man who does not remind us of anyone else. I must ask him whether he still sticks to that opinion, for that would let in Adolf Hitler, which God forbid!

After his return to America, Emerson went to live with his mother in the old family manse in Concord. In order to provide for his very simple needs, he lectured. Two years later, in 1835, he married for the second time, built himself a house near that of the old family homestead, and became Concord's most distinguished citizen. He no longer shared his friend Thoreau's opinion that the philosopher should earn his living by the sweat of his brow. He had tried that sort of thing in a very mild way on his own farm and had come to the conclusion that hands covered with blisters from digging ditches were not very well suited to holding a goose quill in the evening when their owner had withdrawn to his study to confide his ideas to his note-books.

The lecture business, when Emerson took the road, was still a very uncomplicated affair. Lecturers were not yet billed like so many bales of oratory and shuttled about from Chicago to Miami, and from Miami to Seattle, with slender regard for their well-being but with both eyes firmly fixed on the box-office returns. During half a century (Emerson lived to be almost eighty) this lay preacher travelled leisurely up and down the land, spreading his gospel of physical and spiritual independence and urging his listeners to try all things and hold fast to that which, after due experience, had proved to be best.

Once in a while, when Emerson spoke a little more plainly than usual, the rather aggressive disciples of John Calvin would try to stir the community up against him. For example, in 1838, when in a famous lecture he pointed out several of the defects of historical Christianity and begged his listeners to cast conformity behind them and get in direct touch with the Deity, his words caused a terrific stir among the deacons and supervisors and trustees in charge of New England's churches and theological seminaries. There even was a little witch-hunting, lest some of the younger men studying for the pulpit might become contaminated by this dangerous doctrine which made man an actual partner of God during his peregrinations on earth.

Emerson was asked to explain himself further upon the subject, but this he wisely declined to do. He felt that he was entitled to judgment



can be done well, but who has overlooked the fact that other pianists, being imports from Russia or Poland, have started out with certain natural advantages which he himself can never hope to acquire.

Emerson was conscious of his handicap. He knew where Mount Parnassus was situated. Occasionally, he could even admire it from afar. But the Muses would never invite him in for a social cup of ambrosia and afterwards, perhaps, a little dance on the green. Being the sort of person he happened to be, he never expressed any regret at having missed so many good times. He was a New England gentleman, and his wife probably would not have approved of such goings-on. Nor, for that matter, would his neighbours. The arts were a dangerous pastime, for they might make one feel what a marvellous thing life could really be if one approached it from the angle of the senses. Concord Common, after all, was not exactly the place for a *Kleine Nachtmusik*, nor would it have fitted into the New England scheme of things if Louisa May Alcott, garbed in muslin, should have volunteered to lead the Russian ballet through some of its more intricate steps.

But Concord was a very nice place in which to spend one's days, and it offered certain advantages one could never have hoped to find in Salzburg or Vienna. For example, when your house burned down (as happened in the case of Emerson), your neighbours would rebuild it for you; when you grew very old and became a little vague and began to wander without exactly remembering who you were or where you lived, some stranger would kindly take you by the hand and guide you safely home. And those little amenities of life and those quiet and unassuming civilities made up for a great many other things. And so a blessing upon the good people of this modern Athens. They may not always have understood very clearly what their sage was trying to convey to them, but at least they did not crucify him.

Concord is still there, and it has retained more of its ancient charm and atmosphere than many a famous European shrine. And there by the banks of the Concord river one can, provided one finds a place to sit down, meditate quietly upon the strange fate of America.

There was that earlier period of which Emerson wrote—the America of the Currier and Ives prints—the endless fields and prairies and forests, which seemed to contain enough food to feed all the hungry multitudes of this earth. There were the small villages inhabited by self-reliant citizens, each one of them inspired by the ambition to give his children every possible educational advantage that they might go through life as useful Americans, functioning to the best of their abilities and taking an interest in all the truly worth-while things of life. And those unhurrying

wings and proudly proclaimed itself the protector and champion of all the oppressed of this world.

The newcomers, without any roots in the soil and too restlessly active to become an integral part of the landscape (as the New Englanders had done), were not interested in the message of America. As long as their polyglot boarding-house served them better meals than they had enjoyed in the Old World, they asked few questions and rarely bothered to wait for an answer. They may have heard vaguely that in the beginning of its independent career this nation, which, outwardly at least, they had now made their own, had been very conscious of its glorious destiny. But destiny, not being convertible into immediate and tangible profits, seemed of much smaller importance to them than the matter in hand, which was the business of plundering a continent (not to be confounded with real pioneering)—and to hell with everything else.

Whether Emerson noticed the change that had come over his beloved republic it would be hard to decide from his books. His letters show that he was by no means blind to the fact that the United States of America had sold its birthright for a great many barrels of pottage. But either he was too old or too tired to join that small band of brave souls who marched forth to battle the real enemies of their common land—those who despoil the country for their personal profit. Then again, we may have to look for the reason of his apparent blindness or indifference in that quality (so strongly developed in him) which one of our great modern philosophers has called his “fatalistic optimism.”

In the feeling that everything in the end would be for the best in the best of all possible worlds, Emerson did not stand alone. Most of his contemporaries shared this view. It was part of their heritage. It had come down to them from the days when the name of America had still been synonymous with the words ‘hope’ and ‘abundance.’

Emerson died the same year I was born, and so I enjoyed the privilege of sharing our planet with him for only three months. It is pleasant to remember that for a short time at least I was the fellow-passenger of a man who wrote with his heart rather than with his brain.

For we need both kinds of philosophers to maintain a national balance, and so, my dear friend, until Saturday, when we shall have both the prophet of the heart and the champion of the intellect underneath the same roof. I hope they enjoy their dinner. Good night.

The next Saturday was one of those rare days in October when the Low Countries enjoy their few days of Indian summer. I was very busy at that moment with my slightly idiotic efforts to get Rembrandt discharged from the bankruptcy court. I had discovered that this had never



THE FIGURE LOOKED LIKE MONSIEUR RENÉ DESCARTES

him. And since it was still too early to go to Frits' (it was only a quarter to seven), I suggested that we walk to the end of the harbour, for there I would be able to show him the kind of architecture to which he must have become accustomed during his long residence in Amsterdam and Leiden and Rynsburg.

The so-called 'sea gate' stood wide open. We passed through it and for a while leaned across the old stone parapet, while I explained that on the other side of our harbour there used to be a tower exactly like the one behind us. But it had been used as a storehouse for gunpowder and during a thunderstorm had been struck by lightning, and the whole structure, together with parts of the city wall, had been blown into the sea.

"Yes," Descartes remarked, "the German monk who invented that terrible chemical compound did, I am afraid, more harm than good." He said this as casually as one of our contemporary scientists might observe that, while Alfred Nobel had undoubtedly meant well when he invented his dynamite to help the farmers of Sweden remove stones and tree-stumps from their fields, he might perhaps have done less harm if he had stuck to engineering instead of switching over to chemistry.

I very much wanted to continue our conversation along this line for a little longer, but just then our attention was attracted by the sight of a small boat that was being rowed towards Veere and seemed to be coming from the island of Noord Beveland.

"Another visitor," Descartes asked, "and so late in the evening?"

"That is not what strikes me as so curious," I answered, "but a native of either of these two islands would have waited for the seven o'clock ferry, which would have brought him here in five minutes and at much less expense. It will take this man at least half an hour and it will cost him a guilder or even more."

"Perhaps he is in a hurry," Descartes remarked.

"Even so, he is taking a risk, for the tide runs very strong here. With only one man to row him, he may be carried out to sea."

The tide, however, was considerate, for the rowing-boat made straight for our dock, and I could observe the person who was sitting in the stern. I was familiar with that long, falcon-like nose and those eyebrows. It was Ralph Waldo Emerson.

"Do you know this person?" Descartes asked.

"I do, but of course only from his pictures, as he died when I was only a few months old. He will be your fellow-guest this evening. He is an American. His name is Emerson."

"*Connais pas*," Descartes answered with that sense of finality a true Frenchman can put into these two words when he wishes to indicate that

It was now well past seven o'clock, and I hastened with our two guests to Frits' door. The meal seemed to have been well chosen, except that Emerson mistook our Bordeaux for a cheap Italian wine which he said he remembered from his last visit to the Continent, a remark that made Descartes shudder and ask for another glass.

As for the conversation, that too was not quite what we had expected. Here we had two of the rarest brains of all times brought together underneath one single roof, but somehow or other the talk refused to get started, and even Erasmus seemed at a loss how to bring a little life into the somewhat dreary intercourse.

The music, too, failed to loosen our guests. Descartes made bread pills and drew imaginary lines on the tablecloth with his butter knife, while Emerson told us that something in Gombert's *In festis beatæ Mariæ Virginis* reminded him of a hymn he had sung as a child in Boston. We therefore sent word to Hein Verlinde to turn off the gramophone, and at the same time I asked Hein to go to my home and ask Jimmie to give him the original editions of the *Principia philosophiæ*, the *Discours de la Méthode*, and the *Passions de l'âme*, all of which I happened to have.

Hein returned in less than ten minutes, and then a miracle happened. Descartes, placing his hands tenderly on those old parchment bindings, became a man transformed. "*Mes enfants!*" he exclaimed, "my own dearly beloved children!" and I expected that he would kiss his paper offspring. But ere he could do this, Emerson too arose from the lethargy that had held him in its clutches all during the evening.

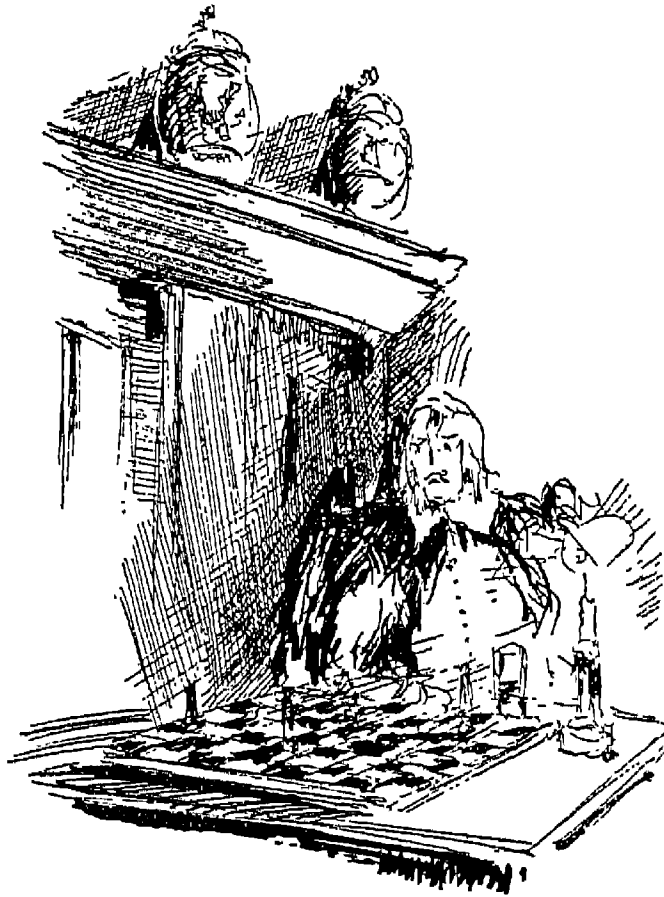
"Of course! Now I understand," he said with more emotion than I had thought him capable of. "Now at last I understand! I knew Dr Erasmus the moment I set eyes upon him, but I had not quite caught the other gentleman's name. I am rather deaf and I am very bad at catching names, but now I understand. It is the famous philosopher, René Descartes!"

Blessed be the great of heart, for they are like children in their vanities. Descartes had spent all his days trying to avoid coming in contact with his fellow-men, but he had felt deeply hurt that a fellow-guest had been ignorant of his identity. Now the ice was broken, and, after that, everything was easy, and during the rest of the evening the two men behaved like old friends.

Emerson confessed that mathematics had always been a closed book to him, and Descartes replied that an intelligent man should be ashamed of such a remark. "There is nothing quite as simple in all the world," he told Emerson. "Just let me show you," and he went (just as an example of how really simple they were) into a discussion of co-ordinates, using our beautiful tablecloth as his blackboard, to the great horror of the good

However, as both our guests seemed to enjoy themselves thoroughly, we did not think that it was up to us to interfere with their innocent pleasure, and so almost a whole hour went by before Frits, remembering that we still had a bottle of Tokay left in the cellar, suggested that we come up for air and spend the rest of the evening talking.

The short space of time that then followed made up for the disappointments we had experienced during the first part of our meal. For now, at



#### THE GREATEST MATHEMATICIAN AND THE WORST GAME OF CHESS

last, both Descartes and Emerson were able to let themselves go. They did not merely talk. They seemed to be striking sparks.

And what did they talk about?

Erasmus had given them their lead: what would our world be like if we allowed free rein to human intelligence in our warfare upon the unknown forces of nature?

Both our guests were in their true element, and I did not wonder that the University of Paris and the learned divines of Yale (the great stronghold of orthodoxy in the America of the first half of the last century) had been so profoundly upset by the teachings of these two men. For if the broad and tolerant ideas of these faithful searchers after the truth, arrived at by personal observation, should ever be allowed to prevail, the

## CHAPTER VIII

### In Order Not to Be Too One-sided, We Plan to Invite Two Members of the Feminine Sex, and the EMPRESS THEODORA OF BYZANTIUM and QUEEN ELIZABETH OF ENGLAND Make Their Appearance

SO far we had invited only men, and Jimmie and Lucie were becoming more and more insistent that we pay some attention to their own sex. "When are the ladies going to appear?" Jimmie used to ask us every Sunday. Not because she was much of a feminist. On the contrary, from the very beginning she had insisted that there were not enough women in history who came sufficiently up to our specifications to provide entertainment for even one single evening. This we had always stoutly denied (more out of politeness than out of conviction), but as Lucie had invariably taken Jimmie's side, we had never got very far.

That Lucie and Jimmie—both of whom were such strong personalities that the average male looked pathetic compared with either of them—that they should be so hard on their own sex had always surprised us, or at least we had pretended that it had done so. Deep down in our hearts we knew that they were right. Lucie—as great an artist in her own right as anybody in the land—maintained that women hated going in for public life, that a woman in an office was an anomaly, something like the proverbial trained seal (wonderful that a seal could play a trombone at all, but why should it?), and therefore out of her element and necessarily unhappy. Jimmie, whose precise mathematical brain would have let her run (and successfully, too) any public accountant's office, was even harder on her sisters. "I used to work for a living," she often said, "and I hated it, except that it gave me the independence I loved. But men have made enough of a mess of this world without us women making it still worse."

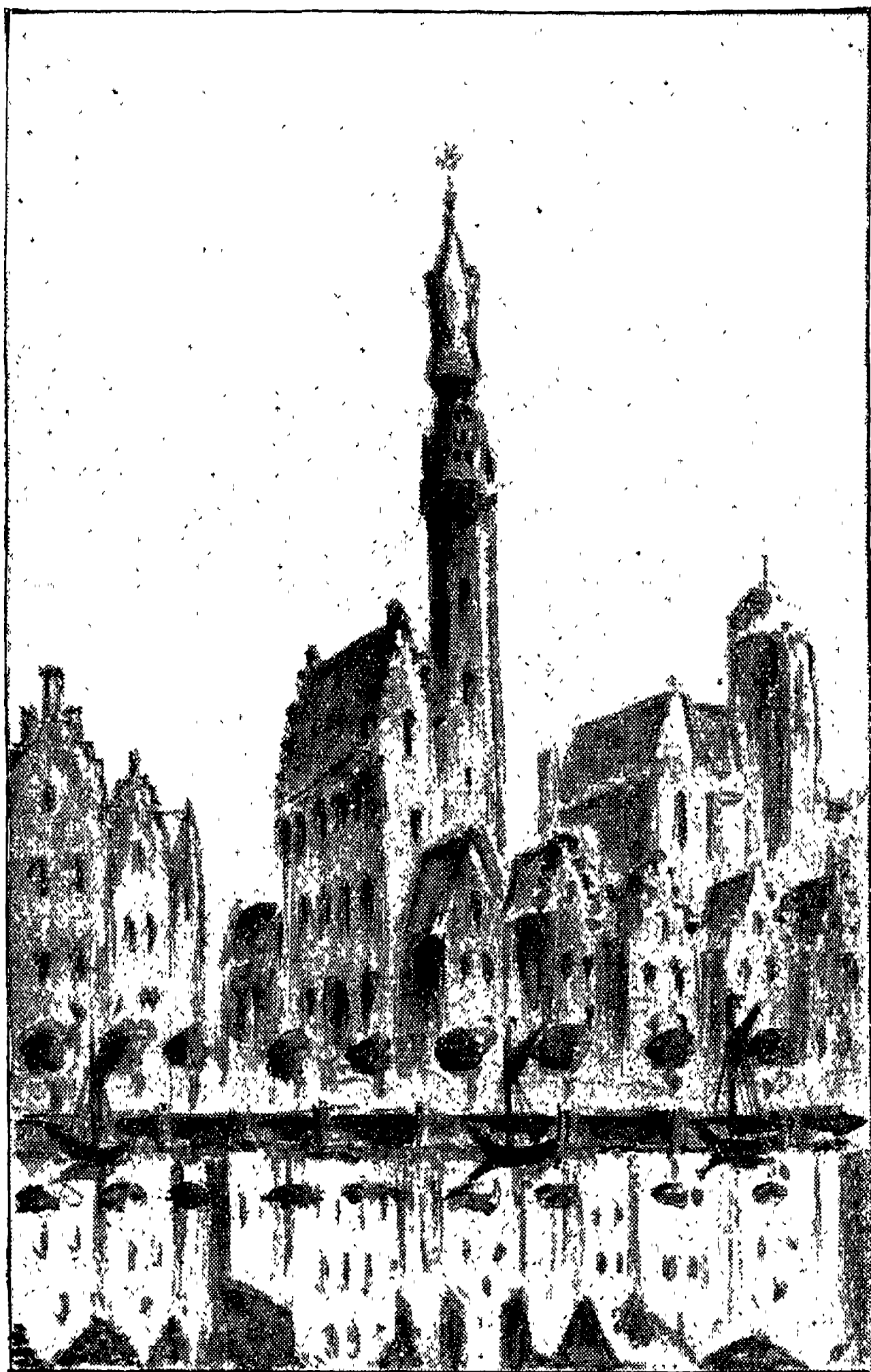
"Then," we inquired, "what should the dear creatures do?"

"What they have always done and what they can do best."

"And that is?"

"Have children, manage their households, and run their families. That is enough of a job to keep any woman busy all the time."

"But how about American women who live in flats and have no households to run because their households run themselves?" I realized that I was being hopelessly commonplace, but any port in a storm.



OUR VILLAGE ARISING FROM THE MORNING MISTS



"The stuff smells the house up something terrible!"

"I know it, but they had so few other vegetables. They will be accustomed to their daily cabbage. What would you suggest?"

"A salad."

"Neither of them ever saw a leaf of salad as long as she lived."

"We can't always have beans."

"No, we can't. They are getting pretty tiresome. Think of something else."

"Potatoes?"

"Were not invented until years later, and when they did come to Europe, the people would not touch them. They used to eat the leaves (which made them sick) and threw the rest away."

"How about peas?"

"No, but that gives me an idea. We will feed them on the pods. They will like those better, anyway, than the peas, and you can mix them up in your stew."

"And then afterwards," Frits said, "let us do something funny. Let us give them ice-cream."

"A lovely idea—and not warn them what it is!"

"They probably would eat that too with their fingers," Jo once more put in.

"They will drop it soon enough," Frits consoled her, and so we left it at that. A nice, garlicky stew with something civilized on the side for Erasmus, Frits, and me, and ice-cream as a surprise and novelty for our guests. As for beverages, Elizabeth would probably prefer beer (the sourest beer we could get) and any kind of Greek wine the ship-chandler in Flushing could get us, mixed with rosin, for the benefit of the Empress.

The musical part of the evening, too, was going to be very complicated, for Theodora's music would be Greek to Elizabeth, and Elizabeth's music would mean absolutely nothing to Theodora, because she would have been accustomed to an entirely different scale. If we could only find some early Greek music! But we tried very hard, and nothing turned up that was any good. There were records which called themselves "Delphic hymns" and which claimed to be the real thing, but they had been reconstructed from very doubtful originals (after all, what do we know about Greek musical notation? Nothing!), and I refused to buy them but ordered quite a number of Gregorian chants. I asked for the oldest ones they had, some of which, curiously enough, were on records sung by the seminary choirs of Montreal. For good measure, I also bought a pilgrims' song called *Congaudeant catholici*, which was said to go back all the way to the twelfth century, and a so-called 'double organum' on the chant *Hæc dies*.

strife between these two mighty bishops. Occasionally the Bishop of Jerusalem also put in a claim to supremacy, for he lived in the city in which the Lord had lived and died and he felt, therefore, that he was a little closer to those events out of which the Church itself had been born. And then there were dozens of other bishops, in France and in Spain and Syria, who resented the claims of supremacy of their Roman colleague, but this was the era of the great migrations, and their territories had been so thoroughly plundered by successive hordes of barbarians that their part of the world hardly counted.

As for Britain, nothing much remained of it but a name and a vague recollection of a pleasant and prosperous island which for almost four hundred years had been an ideal place for Roman officials and officers in which to settle down after they had retired from active service and were ready to enjoy their pensions. And finally there was Africa, but the desert which now stretched for a thousand miles along the southern coast of the Mediterranean was something very different from what it had been in the days of Augustus and Tiberius. Then it had supported millions of people for whom there was no longer any room on the continent of Europe. Now the jackal howled his doleful song amid the ruins of old country houses, and pillar saints were scratching themselves on the roofs of temples long since fallen into decay. Indeed, wherever one looked it was a sad picture of downfall and neglect, but there is one thing we ought to keep well in mind. To the people of the fifth and sixth centuries of our era, the tragedy was not half as real as it is to us who look at all these events from a great distance.

When your Aunt Emily is run over by a lorry and killed on the spot, it is a matter of profound grief to all concerned. When, on the other hand, the dear lady takes thirty years in which to die and when during these thirty years you have asked her nurse at least once a week. "And how is dear Tante doing to-day? Not so well, I suppose," and when for thirty years the nurse, who has waxed comfortably stout on the job, has assured you, "The dear soul! No, she is far from well, but she is holding up bravely," you will in the end have grown so familiar with the old lady's unfortunate state of health that you no longer care about the outcome either one way or the other.

Should she ever really die (which you have begun to doubt), then it will be necessary to bury her and put a slab of something on her grave, for that is the decent thing to do, after which you can conveniently forget about her because she has long ceased to be a true object of pity to anyone. And the same holds good for any human being or human institution that has outlived its own usefulness. It has degenerated into an expense and has become a bore.

Turks, brought it to his immediate attention. For the rest of the time he was as unconscious of it as we ourselves are of the fact that right under our own noses our own civilization is rapidly coming to an end.

Suppose, my dear Frits, that you had taken the lovely Byzantine Theodora out for dinner (which at one time of her career you could have done for the price of a meal and a little present: "Oh, darling, you will give me a little present, won't you?") and had asked her whether she did not think the world was in a dreadful mess—what with Rome gone and revolution rampant in every part of the empire and no respect any longer from anybody for anything—I am quite sure that she would not have had a very distinct idea of what you were talking about. The world around her was the only one she had ever known or expected to know, and there could be nothing wrong with a society in which the daughter of a man who had fed the bears in the circus and had kept their cages clean—a girl who had started with nothing but her good looks and her hard common sense—could work her way up from the streets of Constantinople to a bedroom in the imperial palace. Surely a world in which all that was possible could not be called a bad one. A crazy sort of place, perhaps, but had it ever been otherwise, and had not all the great philosophers of antiquity taught that life was as meaningless as a cork bobbing up and down on the waves of the sea, as aimless as a kite that has lost its string, as senseless as the death of a child struck by a bolt of lightning?

Of course, you must not tell anyone else that she had mentioned the old philosophers, for they were no longer allowed to teach their doctrines, and people were no longer allowed to read their books, and it had now become clear why there was so much wickedness and unhappiness in this vale of tears. She had learned this from the so-called 'new men'—those wandering preachers who told the story of a Jewish Messiah Who had been the Son of the true God, Who like a common slave had suffered death on the cross but Who had arisen from the grave and had ascended towards heaven, where He now sat in full splendour on a throne next to that of His Father. Their new prophets disapproved of everything the old philosophers had taught, and their sermons had convinced her and all other good subjects of the Emperor that theirs was the right approach to salvation and that the Greek sages had been all wrong when they maintained that this life was the beginning and end of all things.

Not at all! Our present existence did not really count. It was like one of those dark ante-rooms in the imperial palace where poor petitioners were obliged to spend days and sometimes years before they were finally allowed to enter into the presence of the All-Highest. But when that glorious moment came, they would be richly compensated for their long wait in that gloomy place. For then they would behold the great King

testimony of a corrupt witness, for he had no way to defend himself. He could be deprived of his home, of his wife and children, to pay for a debt he had never contracted. But before this new tribunal, situated in the heart of the kingdom of heaven, all people were equal. Neither rank nor caste was there accepted as sufficient grounds for 'preferential treatment.' There the soul stood, naked before its Creator. There, with anxious eyes, the poor sinner watched while the golden scales were made ready to weigh his fate.

Into one of those scales the recording angel, who acted as general secretary, would pour the sum total of one's sins. Into the other would go the accumulation of such good deeds and tender thoughts as one had bestowed upon one's fellow-men. Then the room would grow very silent, for not even the breath of a small child must disturb the pendulum in its search after the right balance. It was then, just before their fate was to be announced, that the most ruthless of conquerors, the mightiest of princes, the craftiest of women, were known to have blanched with fear, for at last they were forced to realize that this was a universe based upon moral law, in which nothing was left to either chance or accident and which was ruled by but a single question, asked of both master and slave: "Hast thou been truly faithful to My commands?"

All this was not just a pretty fable to the people of Byzantium of the sixth century of our era. To them it was truth, and heaven and hell were actual facts, as visible and tangible as the mountains on the other side of the Bosphorus. And it was against such a background of stark realities, both in this world and the other, that Theodora, the daughter of Acasius, keeper of the bear-pits in the municipal circus, rose from the streets of Constantinople until she had reached the golden steps that led directly—so she hoped—to the throne of God.

But please do not try to re-evaluate this strange personage in terms of her modern equivalent of the woman with a mission. She was nothing of the sort. This tiny creature with the big black eyes was as hard as rock. She did not know the meaning of the word 'scruple.' She may have had a conscience, but she never allowed it to interfere with anything she really wanted to do. Her strength lay in the fact that she was possessed of a body that men wanted and wanted more than anything else in this world. She used her physical attractions, as saints have used their spiritual holiness, to achieve the apparently impossible, and, fortunately for the people of Byzantium, that lovely body had been equipped with a brain as sharp and as relentless as a surgeon's scalpel. A little Byzantine girl, thus equipped, could go very far. Theodora did.

We do not know when the future Empress was born, and most of our information about her life and adventures comes from highly doubtful

discovered that their Emperor did not have a drop of Roman or Greek blood in his veins, having been born in what is now Yugoslavia and having at a tender age been brought to Constantinople by his uncle, Justin I, an illiterate peasant from somewhere in Asia Minor.

This noble sovereign had, like most of his predecessors, reached the throne as commander of the palace guards of the Emperor Anastasius, who in turn had reached the throne because he had married Ariadne, the widow of the Emperor Zeno, who in turn had reached the throne because he had married the above-mentioned Princess Ariadne when she was still the maiden daughter of the Emperor Leo I, who, although a Thracian peasant, had come to the throne by the will of his soldiers, thereby succeeding the Emperor Marcian, who had come to the throne by marrying the sister and successor of the Emperor Theodosius II, and so on and so forth.

If from the above you come to the conclusion that the home life of the Byzantine rulers was not quite as peaceful or as beautiful as that of dear Queen Victoria and her amiable and accomplished husband at a somewhat later date in history, you will have guessed right and you will probably agree with me that any young woman who undertook to associate herself with what we might call the 'palace set' did so at her own risk. Theodora must have realized this very clearly, but, having been brought up amid her father's bears, she felt that she could face any situation that would present itself. With her beautiful black eyes wide open, she was willing to incur the risk of some small possible mishap (such as being sewn up in a basket and thrown into the Bosphorus) as long as there was a chance—no matter how small—that she might some day occupy the imperial throne.

She was too much of a daughter of the people not to know that luck is ninety per cent. of everything you ever get in this world, but what of it? She had done pretty well for herself thus far and saw no reason why good fortune should cease to smile on her. The days were long since gone when, in order to keep body and soul together, she had been obliged to take a job as a chorus girl in the ballets at the hippodrome. There a rich Byzantine official had noticed her, and, as he was about to be sent as governor to a very dull province somewhere in Northern Africa, he had decided that this lovely child would be the best way of keeping himself amused during the years of his lonely exile.

The improper arrangements were promptly made, and Theodora sailed across the Mediterranean and settled down as the governor's lady in Pentapolis.

Then as now, a town in the Libyan desert was not exactly the sort of place that would appeal to a young lady of fashion, and Theodora, tiring

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republic. I am afraid, however, that we shall never see the like of her on our side of the ocean. She would never get past the immigration authorities. Moral turpitude would keep her out.

From Florence a car will carry you, in a little over three hours and right across the Apennine Mountains, to the city of Ravenna. It is a dreary little city, and I advise you to make sure of your exit before you bid farewell to the indifferent spaghetti of the Grand Hotel Byron and set out for the most magnificent collection of mosaics to be found anywhere in this world.

To-day Ravenna lies six miles away from the Adriatic, but two thousand years ago it was a lagoon city like Venice and, like Venice, it developed into a flourishing centre of trade at a time when most of the rest of Italy was still a land of farms.

Under Augustus, Ravenna was elevated to the rank of a naval base, the headquarters of the Adriatic squadron, with a harbour large enough for two hundred and fifty ships. But the city did not really come into its own until the year 404, when the Roman Emperor Honorius, feeling that his old residence could no longer offer him sufficient safety, betook himself and his court to this strongly fortified Adriatic harbour, where the sea offered a means of escape when every other road should have been cut off.

Then occurred one of the most far-reaching events of the fifth century. In the year 476 the last of the Roman emperors of purely Roman blood, who bore the absurd name of Romulus Augustulus (both of them diminutives), was pushed off the throne by the commander of his foreign body-guard, a Teutonic chieftain by the name of Odoacer. The new ruler felt so sorry for the poor, handsome, but incompetent young man that he spared his life and allowed him to spend the rest of his days at the villa that Lucullus, the well-known war profiteer and the most spectacular and the earliest of all gourmets, had built several hundred years before on the shore of the Bay of Naples. A few years later Odoacer was in turn murdered by still another foreigner, by the name of Theodoric, head of the tribe of the Ostrogoths but a baptized Christian and a barbarian with the advantages of an education in Constantinople.

Theodoric made Ravenna the capital of his own Ostrogoth empire and started a building boom which ended with the construction of his own grave, a most extraordinary piece of work, especially considering the time it was built, as the roof consists of a single slab of stone almost thirty-six feet in diameter. How did they ever get it up there, with their primitive tackles and pulleys? I am sorry, but we don't know.

In the year 539 this Ostrogoth state was overthrown by the Byzantine

used it as the model for his own cathedral at Aix-la-Chapelle. From the outside it now strikes the modern spectator as being very much like just another small-town church, such as one might find in any of the better suburbs in the Middle West. But no one visits this structure to look at the bricks. The mosaics are the thing. They were put there while Ravenna was a metropolis and the capital of one of the Emperor Justinian's western provinces. That makes them almost fourteen hundred years old.

The art of mosaic-making has almost completely died out, until to-day it takes its place with falconry and archery. A great many people even experience considerable difficulty in knowing what all these bits of coloured glass may mean and complain that these portraits affect their eyes in the same way as Gregorian music affects their ears—as something too stiff and too lacking in animation to appeal to their modern taste. Should you find yourself in the company of barbarians of that kind, bribe the sexton to take them away by a promise of showing them something really worth while—"dirty pictures of the old Roman days." Then sit yourself down in a quiet corner and pay your respects to their Majesties.

On one side of the altar you will see the Emperor Justinian, surrounded by Saint Maximian, the Archbishop of Ravenna who consecrated this church in 547, and a few of his servants and bodyguards. The Emperor, as you will notice, has been provided with a halo, which was his good right as a successor to those rulers who during the beginning of their career had been closely identified with the sun-god and his shining orb. And on the left side of the choir niche you will see the woman he made his wife and with whom he shared his life and his throne.

The dancing-girl of Constantinople's hippodrome, the courtesan of half a dozen cities in Africa and western Asia, also wears the attribute of power and sainthood. She stands in front of a small drinking fountain, probably placed there by the artist for the sake of balance, for on the left side of the picture there are no human figures. There is merely an indication of a dark gallery, apparently leading to the interior of the palace. It is screened off from the rest of the building by a curtain that one of the servants is in the act of pushing aside, indicating that her Majesty is about to withdraw into her own apartments. A retinue of ladies in waiting fills the right side of the panel. A severe-looking duenna stands immediately behind the Empress, who carries a chalice in her delicate hands. Her sandalled feet protrude just the tiniest little bit from beneath her heavy ceremonial robe. She wears a crown and enough jewellery to ransom a dozen kings. But soon you will begin to be aware of only one impression. The picture will dissolve itself into a pair of eyes, the eyes of the Empress Theodora, and in them you may read that mysterious chapter of history which is called Woman.



being luckier than her predecessors, died a natural death (of puerperal fever) when her child was twelve days old. After that there were no more little half-brothers and -sisters in Elizabeth's life, as was to have been expected with her kind of father. There were, however, three more stepmothers.

First of all (now let me carefully follow the record), there was Anne of Cleves, a plump, red-faced German princess who was supposed to bring the Defender of the Faith, now in open conflict with the Pope, the support of the Protestant rulers of Germany. She was so completely unlike the miniatures which the advocates of this match on the Continent had sent to Henry that he immediately sent her off.

Next came Catherine Howard (No. 5). That was in 1540, when Elizabeth was seven years old, and two years later this new stepmother suffered the same fate as Anne Boleyn. She was decapitated for 'immorality'—both before and after marrying the King. In her case the evidence seems to have been true enough. Catherine Howard apparently had had several lovers, one a cousin, another a musician, a third one—I am sorry, but I have forgotten what he did for a living. Why Henry had not looked into this matter a little more carefully before he married the lady we do not know, unless he had so greatly desired to gain the support of the influential House of Howard that he had decided to leave bad enough alone. But shortly after the wedding had been celebrated his faithful friend, Archbishop Cranmer, began to do a little investigating of his own. He started asking questions among the former servants of the new Queen and soon had got all the details he needed for his purpose by bribing a former parlourmaid. With his news he hastened to the King, and his Majesty lost no time but acted with his usual energy, at least in matters affecting his matrimonial happiness.

One of his wife's former lovers was imprisoned and, having been very thoroughly tortured, confessed everything. The Queen, threatened with a similar fate, agreed that all this young man had revealed was true enough, but swore that since she had been married to the King she had been a model of virtue.

It did not do her any good, for on February 13, 1542, she lost her head. Elizabeth was then nine years old.

A year later Henry married Catherine Parr (Ploetz listing, No. 6), and in her the King at last met his match. The lady, who had already been married twice before, stood for no nonsense, and, as a result, was one of the two of the six wives to survive her royal Bluebeard.

I like Catherine Parr. She was a woman who knew what she wanted and got it. Without waiting for Henry's funeral flowers to fade, she married her fourth husband, an adventurous gentleman by the name of

half of the sixteenth century. But private privateering was in direct competition with the official privateering of the Government. Then, as now, the English courts took a very serious view of such an act, and Thomas Seymour lost his head.

After his departure Elizabeth was to enjoy a period of almost four years during which none of her friends or relatives came to a violent end and during which she was able to enjoy herself without that everlasting and uncomfortable question: "Who is going to be next?" Her amiable half-brother, Edward, was on his throne. Her not-so-amiable half-sister, Mary, was in her closet saying her prayers, and all seemed serene and quiet along the banks of the Thames. But underneath this outward appearance of "ye olde merrinesse," certain things were happening that were far from merry.

Sir Thomas Seymour, whom I dispatched a few sentences ago, had had a ward, an honest-to-goodness ward, not the kind you are so apt to see in the movies. Her name was Jane Grey. She had been a mere child, only nine, when she had been allowed to go and live with Catherine Parr. When Catherine died, she should have returned to her own parents, but she refused to go back to her happy home, and nothing could make her budge, an act for which we can hardly blame the poor child. From her earliest days on, her parents (her mother belonged to the royal family) had been brutally severe with her. Noticing their daughter's precocity, they had intended to turn her into the prodigy of the age and they had filled her innocent head with so much Latin, Greek, Arabic, Hebrew, and Chaldean that it was ready to burst. Going to the Parr home, where she had been allowed to be her own age, had been like going to paradise, and to make the visit to dear Aunt Catherine's even more wonderful, there was Aunt Catherine's husband, who had promised her that some day she would marry young King Edward and would be a real queen with a crown on her head. As both children were exactly eleven years old when this pleasant plan was made, little Lady Jane would, of course, have to practise a little patience, but she could use that interval to learn a few more languages.

It was Edward who put an end to her dreams. He refused to improve in health, and it was beginning to look highly doubtful whether he would ever grow into manhood. And so Lady Jane, with the approval of Edward (who, when it came to the other sex, did not at all take after his royal father), was quietly married to the fourth son of the Duke of Northumberland, the man who was then the power behind the throne.

But now Jane discovered that she had only jumped from the frying-pan into the fire. The Northumberlands were a bad lot. Jane soon came to hold them in a profound, if slightly adolescent, detestation. Number

rumours were whispered a little louder, the executioners in the Tower hopefully anticipated a speedy increase in their revenues.

It was during this period that Elizabeth got thoroughly versed in that art of dissimulation which was to be of such great value to her when she was obliged to play the rôle of loving sovereign to many of her subjects whom she intended to send to the gallows at the first possible opportunity. And, in addition, she now learned to play Br'er Possum and to make herself practically invisible whenever her spies informed her that the Spanish councillors of King Philip were once again trying to persuade his Majesty that, for the sake of his own safety and that of his wife, he had better rid himself of the continued presence of this obstinate and headstrong English princess.

Philip realized that he could do this if he wished to. Mary, his wife, had fallen desperately in love with him and would grant him whatever he desired. In March of the year 1554 things reached such a pass that Elizabeth was actually sent to the Tower in some sort of 'protective custody.' But the English people, none too squeamish about spilling the blood of their great noble families, drew the line at beheading a Tudor, even if legally this particular offspring was considered to be a bastard.

Parliament, now the centre of the Protestant opposition, hastily and eagerly rushed to the defence of their princess in distress. It would not even listen when, as a compromise, it was suggested that Elizabeth be excluded from ever succeeding to the throne. It grew even more deaf to the agitation against the Princess Elizabeth when it was rumoured about that Mary was on the point of presenting her Spanish husband with an English heir. This anticipated happy event soon proved to be a false alarm, but there was always the chance that some day it might prove true, and then the cause of Protestantism in England would be lost for ever. The future looked very dark indeed, for the Queen had not only been busy with that bassinet that was never to see service, but she had also spent her leisure hours (except when she was writing letters to her dear Philip, begging him to return to her from Spain) rallying all her Catholic supporters around her and by the severity of her anti-Protestant measures was rapidly gaining for herself that name which will be hers until the end of history—"Bloody Mary."

Two months after Elizabeth had been confined in the Tower, Mary discreetly let it be known that she was once more 'expecting.' That was an excellent excuse for Elizabeth's friends to insist upon some act of clemency to celebrate the event, and Mary graciously permitted her beloved sister to proceed to Hatfield House, where she was to perfect herself further in the knowledge of the Latin and Greek tongues and other branches of learning that had very little to do with statecraft.

The new Queen was twenty-five years old and she was going to reign over England during the next forty-five years. At last she was safe, or so she thought, for another Mary—far more dangerous than her namesake of the Tudor tribe—was now to appear upon the horizon to make the first twenty-nine years of Elizabeth's reign as troublesome and dangerous as anything that had gone before.

This other Mary, known to us as Mary, Queen of Scots, was the daughter of James V, King of Scotland, and of his wife, a French duchess belonging to the House of Guise. This lady had been united in holy wedlock with her Stuart in the year 1538 and had given birth to her daughter in 1542, and with the arrival of this child there opened up such a chapter of trouble as the world had rarely seen.

I can only give you the bare outline of this famous case. Mary of Scotland was the exact opposite of her English cousin, Elizabeth. No man ever went crazy about Elizabeth of England, whereas every man lost his head (often in the painful and literal sense of the word) the moment he beheld the steady blue eyes of this beauteous Franco-Scottish princess. It may be true that in her case nature had been considerably helped out by art, for it is chronicled that when the axeman picked up her head to show it to those who had witnessed her execution, he discovered to his great dismay that her famous auburn tresses were not the lady's own but merely a wig, I feel inclined, however, to believe that she had been forced to such little beauty aids owing to the illness that had attacked her as the result of her many years of close confinement in a number of unhealthy gaols. Before that time her charms must have been considerable and entirely her own. Otherwise she could hardly have been the subject of so many and such desperate lovers' quarrels. Most of these have been repeatedly dramatized by some of our most gifted playwrights and authors, and I need not repeat them to you in detail. I can start with the year 1565, when Mary, after a career as fantastic as that of any modern Reno heroine, finally married one Henry Stuart, Lord Darnley, in his own right a claimant to the Scottish throne. He was said to be inclined towards the Catholic faith, which may have been a recommendation in the eyes of Mary, but was not likely to make him more popular among the rank and file of his wife's subjects. His weakness, his indecision, his vulgarity, and his tendency towards every known form of dissipation soon made Mary loathe him, for Mary was a lady. She found solace for her disgust in the company of her Italian secretary, David Rizzio.

This young man had come originally to Scotland as a member of an embassy the Duke of Savoy had sent to Scotland. When that mission came to an end, he remained behind as bass singer in the quartet which

pack her husband off to the country that he might recuperate—but out of her sight. A near-by country house, Kirk-o'-Field, was chosen as his place of convalescence.

On February 9 Mary visited the patient, returning to Edinburgh that same evening. A few hours later the place was blown sky-high by means of barrels of gunpowder concealed in the cellar. The next day the bodies of Darnley and his page were found in the bushes outside the house. They had apparently survived the explosion, had tried to escape, and had been murdered by the conspirators who had anticipated such a possibility and had hidden themselves in the near-by woods.

Scotland sat up and took notice. Two murders in royal circles in less than a year's time were almost too much of a good thing, even in a country where violent death was by no means uncommon and was considered part of the national game of politics.

When shortly afterwards the local gossips were able to inform their neighbours that Mary now planned to marry the Earl of Bothwell, who was said to have been responsible for the plot against Darnley's life, the Scotch divines had at last solid reason to denounce their French Jezebel as a scourge of God and to insist that something be done about her before the whole of the nation perish. To appease their wrath, Mary married her Jamie in a Protestant church. But it was too late, for by this time the public had learned that the noble Earl already had had quite a number of wives and that it was highly doubtful whether he had been legally set free from his latest partner.

That was the final straw which broke the rugged Caledonian back. The whole of Scotland arose against its Queen. Mary was forced to send Bothwell away while she herself was taken to Lochleven, an old castle situated on an island in a lake and therefore thought to be an ideal prison.

But Mary was a lady who knew how to make use of those bewitching eyes. Those lovely orbs persuaded one of her guards to close his own while his charge walked out of the front gate.

Mary was now once more a free woman, but had not yet quite understood that her Scots would have no more of her. She hastily gathered a few faithful old henchmen around her royal personage and boldly marched against her enemies. She was defeated and being unable to escape by sea, she fled to England, and from English soil she appealed to her dear Cousin Elizabeth to provide her with an asylum.

Elizabeth answered as graciously as it was within her nature to be (and she could be quite gracious when it suited her purposes) that she was delighted to welcome her dear cousin and would gladly protect her against her former subjects. Then the fat was in the fire (or, to put it more elegantly, Mary was in prison), and she was to stay there for

In the year 1586 a new plot against the life of Elizabeth was unearthed. One Anthony Babington, a former page of Mary, was the intermediary who had arranged everything. Mary was heavily implicated. She was brought to trial and condemned to death. Elizabeth had already caused enough heads to roll during the last thirty years not to wish for further unpleasant memories. She refused to sign the death-warrant. She claimed that it might lead to complications with her presumptive successor, James of Scotland, if she should cut off his mother's head.

Those were panicky days for England. The rumours about a fleet of hundreds of ships of tremendous size then being constructed in Spain to reconquer the British Isles for the Catholic faith had put everybody on edge. The people wanted to be rid of this Scottish trollop who was making friends with their enemies and who—some fine night—might cause all Protestants to be murdered in their beds. Elizabeth still hesitated. Decapitating a cousin was something different again from performing the same operation upon a mere subject like Essex, who had been under the mistaken impression that certain alleged familiarities with the person of the anointed Majesty entitled him to strut around as if he had ever been accepted as her official lover.

It was Mary's own son who settled the problem. If James of Scotland had as much as hinted that he wanted his mother's life spared, Elizabeth would have been relieved of the most difficult decision she was ever forced to make. But tongue-tied Jamie Stuart knew what he wanted. He wanted the crown of England and informed Elizabeth that if she would guarantee him the succession in England, he from his side would try to "digest" his grief at his mother's untimely demise and to forget any personal resentment he might feel against the person responsible for her execution.

By this infamous letter about his hope to be able to "digest his grief" James Stuart signed his mother's death-warrant. At eight o'clock of the morning of February 8, of the year 1587, a clumsy axeman hacked Mary's lovely head from her equally lovely shoulders, and Elizabeth was doomed to spend the rest of her days remembering the hour when the Earl of Shrewsbury had presented himself in her closet to inform her Majesty that it was all over and that her rival would never again be able to disturb the peace of the realm.

I suppose that I should now tell you about the great conquests that were made during Elizabeth's reign—how the foundations were laid of that great empire which will always be identified with her name. But you learned all that at school, and I am really much more interested in those subtle qualities of mind and heart which decided the outcome of the

at least two feet wide. The wind was blowing it around her head, and the same merciless gust of air brutally exposed a pair of very spindly legs encased in heavy woollen stockings.

When the Queen beheld us she quickly pulled her skirts down around her knees and addressed us in a way which showed she had been in the habit of expressing herself without mincing her words and expected to have her commands obeyed, no matter to whom she was speaking.

"God's wounds!" she shouted. "And has it come to pass that I shall stand here showing my old buttocks while two miserable wretches grin at my discomfiture?"

"Please your Highness' grace," Frits answered with more elegance than I had ever seen him demonstrate on any previous occasion, "but we had stationed ourselves here expressly that we might bid your Majesty a right hearty welcome."

Elizabeth turned on him ferociously. "By ye gullet of God, young whippersnapper, if one of my courtiers had spoken to me thus, I would have had him up at Tyburn and higher than Tom Wyatt himself!"

Frits, fearing that in his ignorance of the older English vernacular he might have used the wrong expressions, was seriously taken aback.

"I am sorry, madam," he answered, "but what can I possibly have done to incur your Majesty's displeasure and to deserve such a severe condemnation?"

"Ye damned Dutch windmill!" now spoke the royal Majesty, "is that the way to greet a gracious sovereign who sent her men to help you defeat your Spanish enemies in your hour of need and who never yet has been paid back as much as a penny of the money she wasted?"

I knew only too well to what the old harridan was referring. During the beginning of our war of independence she had actually sent a few thousand soldiers under command of her friend, the Earl of Leicester, to help us beat the Spaniards. But this adventure had ended sadly when two English officers betrayed the Dutch cause and sold out to the enemy. I decided that with a person of her Majesty's rather positive views it would do no good to beat around the bush.

"Your Majesty surely is not referring to Stanley and York? I realize that that unfortunate accident happened while my Lord of Leicester was absent on a mission to London, but . . ."

"*Touchée!*" she interrupted. "You may not know your manners, but at least you have not forgotten your history."

I confess that I looked puzzled, and she noticed it. "God's breath!" she fairly shouted at me. "He stands there and is perplexed. Is that the way to greet the Queen?"

"If it please your most gracious Majesty," I said, assuming a humility

I by no means felt, "but what have my friend and I done amiss to incur this most unfortunate displeasure on your Majesty's part?"

"You stand there and ask me!" with the full accent on "stand."

I began to suspect what she was driving at, but the last thing I wanted to do was to kneel down and kiss her hand, as I knew had been the custom at the court. In the first place, the planks of the dock were soaking wet, and in the second place, how could I have explained such an act of debasement to my Veere neighbours, who, I felt sure, were looking at us from behind the closed curtains of every window along the quay. I should have been the butt of all their jokes, for a Zeelander is a stiff-necked creature who never bows his back to any other human being, least of all to a foreign potentate.

"If it please your gracious Majesty once more," I replied with my most polite bow and clicking my heels in the best Austrian fashion, "but this is the way we would salute Her Royal Highness, our own Majesty, the Queen of the Netherlands."

Elizabeth looked puzzled. "So you are a kingdom now! In my days you called yourself a republic. I never liked republics. They have no respect for authority."

"Indeed, your Majesty" (I had never in my life been guilty of so many "majesties" in so few minutes, and I wondered how we should feel when a little later in the evening we would have to deal with an empress), "indeed, your Highness' Grace, we are now happy to call ourselves a kingdom."

"And you are ruled over by a woman, as England was in my day?"

"Not only that, your Majesty, but by a woman whose high sense of duty is only matched by that love which the great Elizabeth bestowed upon her own domains."

"That was rather well spoken. Perhaps, after all, you are a gentleman, though at first I took you for some excise fellow, come to collect on my pearls."

"If I were here to collect on the pearls that drop from your Majesty's lips, I would be my country's benefactor. It would pay our national debt."

Heaven only knows what inspired me to utter this drivel, but it seemed to please the old lady more than anything else we had said. She became almost friendly as she answered, "Then, if that be the way you salute your own Majesty, it is well enough. I shall say no more about it, but for God's sake lead me to a warm place where I can rest mine ancient rump. We had a dreadful crossing. I am frozen through and through, and I am very, very hungry."

"If it will please your gracious Majesty," Frits broke in, "it is but a





QUEEN ELIZABETH HAD JUST SET FOOT ON OUR NATIVE SOIL.

Erasmus smiled at this lamentation which sounded far from convincing, but the Queen did not notice it. "Sir Thomas More indeed!" she went on. "The poor old visionary! I heard it said, however, that he was a fine man."

"No finer English gentleman ever lived."

"Yes, and what did he get for his trouble? He tried to be honest when everybody else was a scoundrel and rascal. I have been told he served my father faithfully and well for a great many years. Then he disapproved of my father getting a divorce, and it was off with his head!"

Erasmus whispered, "I am afraid that was true, your most gracious Majesty."

Elizabeth patted the old man on the sleeve. "Yes, it was an old habit with Father—that and having bastard children."

Again I saw Erasmus quiver. "I am afraid that your most gracious Majesty is right once more," he replied.

"Well," said the Queen, looking around her with satisfaction, "this is a pleasant room. The candles remind me of Hatfield House. I am feeling faint. Why don't we eat?"

"In a moment, your Majesty," I hastened to inform her. "The soup is being served this very minute."

Elizabeth looked at me with suspicion. "You are not by any chance waiting for another guest?" she asked.

"Oh, no, your Majesty," I lied. "That is to say . . ."

"Come on, you scurrilous varlet! Speak up! Since when does the Queen of England have to wait for the arrival of another guest? This is an insult. An infamous insult."

I offered a rather faint apology. "Maybe her Majesty has lost her way," I explained. "You see, we did not go forth to meet her," and I stressed the "her."

"Your Majesty this and her Majesty that! Good God! young man, you have been rash enough to ask two queens to sit down at the same table and underneath the same roof?"

This time I could honestly reply. "We would never dream of such a thing," I assured her.

"Then why did you call that other person 'her Majesty'?"

"She happens to be an empress."

The oath that greeted this announcement I cannot repeat in print, but it left very little to the imagination and clearly indicated what the Queen felt about her sisters of the sacred blood. Then, in a quieter voice, she continued, "An empress indeed! In my day there was but one empress—the wife of that German idiot. Is it she?"

"May it please your Majesty's grace, it is not."

ask you to greet a fellow-guest? This is her Imperial Majesty the Empress Theodora of Byzantium."

But the outburst of fury I had expected did not take place, and an entirely different Elizabeth, fairly beaming good will, arose from her chair, took three steps forward on her high-heeled red satin slippers, and, taking Theodora by the hand, said, "I have read and heard so much about you, my child, that I have always wanted to meet you and now I actually have that pleasure. Do come in and join me by the fire. It is rather cold outside and you must be very tired."

The Empress smiled a faint smile of recognition, but as Elizabeth had spoken to her in English I knew that she had not understood a word that had been spoken. Once more it was our dear Erasmus who saved the situation by addressing the forlorn little figure in classical Greek. He bade her welcome in the name of the Queen of England (*Bretannika* he called it) and invited her to be seated.

And it was Erasmus who took the lead in the conversation, for we found that the lovely Theodora spoke nothing but Greek, understood only a few words of Latin, and claimed a complete ignorance of the Russian I tried on her. Whether she was actually ignorant of this Slavic tongue which she must have heard almost every day at her court among her servants and the officers of the guard, or whether she thought it the better policy not to betray her familiarity with that barbaric vernacular, I could never decide. For I did what I always do in such circumstances: I took a pad of paper and drew pictures of what I wanted to say, and Theodora was as delighted as a child with these scrawls. In fact, before she left she gathered them all together and murmured something about *mneme* or *mneia*, which I took to mean that she wanted to keep them for memory's sake, whereupon I signed them as best I could with my name written in Greek, a fact which highly pleased her and for which she thanked me with a nod of her little head, done with such grace that it will for ever be my *mneme* of that evening.

The seating of our guests was a very delicate matter, and I was sorry that we had not taken the trouble to provide ourselves for this evening with a round table. That always makes it so much easier, for then there is no formal head of the table, and none of the guests can feel slighted. If I remember correctly, we had placed Erasmus at the end of the table that was farthest from the door, on account of his susceptibility to draughts. The Empress sat on his right, the Queen on his left, and Frits and I took the other two seats at the foot of the table.

As for our worries about our guests' ability to handle their forks, there again we had guessed wrong. For although neither of them used that instrument to pick up their food and carry it from their plates to their

that she would not have used the stuff to wash her pigs in, but added that she would like to have just a wee bit more of that mild French wine we had just served her, but this time in a glass that was a glass and not a thimble.

And what did we talk about? You may not believe it, but we spent a whole evening discussing the subject of knitting! I don't know how it came up, but after the ladies had withdrawn for a moment, the Empress to rouge her lips and the Queen to paint her face, Elizabeth came back and informed us with a happy grin, "You know, that child wears a pair of woollen panties! I would have given five counties in Ireland for such a pair when I was still living in that draughty old palace of mine."

Erasmus was too tactful to translate this remark, but the Queen could not be stopped. "Don't mind that old bishop, my child," she said, "and show these gentlemen your shift. You have the loveliest legs I have ever seen and you need not be bashful. Remember you are dead."

This time Erasmus was obliged to repeat what had been said, but Theodora absolutely refused, and, remembering something of her Majesty's past, I could well understand her present delicacy. Elizabeth, however, was peeved. She called her a prude, but, seeing that scolding would do no good, she asked the Empress where she had got them.

"They were sent to me from Cyprus," Theodora answered by way of Erasmus. "That is where I was born."

"Cyprus," Elizabeth mused. "That sounds familiar. Master Shakespeare must have written about it in one of his plays."

I told her that that was most likely, for he loved to have his heroes visit strange places. The Queen, however, was not interested in geography. Her mind was still firmly fixed on her rival's underwear and she asked many further questions which none of us could answer. All this greatly perplexed the poor Empress, who had not the vaguest idea what her bibacious rival was talking about. She turned to Erasmus to enlighten her, who, equally baffled, requested that I get him the Greek dictionary he had brought with him the Saturday before, when we had discussed a rather obscure passage in Plato. "I thought that I knew my Greek," he said, "but knitting and purling and drop-stitching are expressions that rarely occur in either the classics or the writings of the Holy Fathers."

When a few minutes later I returned from upstairs, there was no longer any need of this thesaurus, for Elizabeth, having satisfied her first curiosity and having made her companion thoroughly uncomfortable (we never saw those divine legs of Theodora about which the Queen had waxed so enthusiastic), had dropped the subject and had now started to discuss the subject of taxation—direct taxation *v.* indirect.

Frits told me afterwards how this change had come about. She was

noticed him. "God's wounds!" she said. "And where have you kept this handsome young fellow all night? He even wears a beard. Essex once tried to grow one. To make him look older, I suppose, and a little less like my son. I made him shave it off, though. I wanted no familiarities of that sort at my court. Tell me, my good man, who are you?"

"I am the cook's husband," Hein replied.

"Is she as good in your bed as in her kitchen?" the Queen asked.

"Even better," Hein answered, who had not exactly been brought up as a courtier.

Elizabeth was delighted. "That is what I want to hear," she said, "an honest man! At home everybody would have made a long face and would have refused to tell me the truth. They thought they could fool me. They thought that they could fool Elizabeth! But Elizabeth fooled them forty-four years—or was it forty-five?—and she died peacefully in her bed." Then to Hein: "Where are you going?"

"I am going to start the music," Hein told her.

"No," said the Queen, "you are not. That other young man" (pointing to Frits) "can do that, and I will dance with you."

The remark Hein made in Dutch shall remain untranslated. It was along the line that whatever had got to be done had got to be done, but the Queen paid no attention, for she had noticed that Hein was in his stocking feet.

"Why don't you wear your shoes?"

This time Hein was up to the occasion. "The better to be able to dance with your Majesty," he answered. "These marble tiles are very slippery."

"Then I shall do likewise," said the Queen, and sitting down on a chair, held both feet out to Hein and told him, "Take them off for me."

I then understood why this woman, who had been famous for her penny-pinching and had never paid any of her debts if she could possibly help it, had squandered such large sums upon her bootmakers. Her feet were very well shaped, very short, and very narrow, and so entirely out of keeping with the rest of her that they could have been called positively beautiful.

Upstairs a needle scraped, and then we heard the first bars of *It was a Lover and His Lass*.

"Come on," said the Queen, giving Hein a resounding smack on his ears.

"I am there," Hein answered, with a mighty blow on the royal buttocks.

"You should have been in my navy. You have the makings of a fine boatswain," the Queen told him.

"I am in the navy anyway," Hein replied, "and I know a much better place than an uncomfortable bunk in your Majesty's navy."

Then he took his hand in hers, but she said, "No! put it around my

Finally I asked Frits, "If you were to sum up those guests of to-night (and God knows they were as different as they could be, yet in a way they were alike), what would you say they had in common?"

Frits stirred his tea and then, sort of musing to himself, he said, "What did they have in common? Well, let me think. That is a hard question to answer. What did they have in common? I would say just one thing."

"Yes, and what was it?"

"If you pin me down to just one thing, I would say it was the fact that neither of them had any inhibitions. The old story—the street-walker behaved like a queen, and the queen did her best to behave like a street-walker. But neither of them had any real inhibitions. They both were exactly as God had made them."

"A refreshing experience."

"A wonderful experience; and now I will tell you what we should do by way of contrast. Our next guests should be the exact opposite. They should be walking inhibitions."

"Have you any candidates?"

"Yes, I have, for I have been thinking about them all evening."

"Who are they?"

"Two men. Robespierre and Torquemada."

"That will be a cheerful party!"

"Not exactly. But a very interesting one."

"It's O.K. by me. Go ahead and invite them, and please, Jo, get some more hot water. I feel like a lot of tea to-night."

"As long as there's water, there's tea," Jo told him, falling back on a well-known old Dutch expression, and so we sat and talked for several hours, but I do not remember much of what we said, which is just as well, for experience has taught me that after one o'clock at night, even the most brilliant minds in the world are apt to talk nonsense.

The meal? There was a problem. What were we to feed these two fanatics on? I knew that Robespierre, like the late Theodore Roosevelt, was passionately fond of oranges. He ate oranges as Voltaire used to drink coffee. He ate them in the morning and he ate them at night. So four dozen oranges were duly noted down on Jo's order slip. But oranges do not make a meal, so what else were we to give them? I knew that both these men would be much too much interested in themselves to think of anything else, which is probably the reason why one eats so badly in the homes of people with a cause.

After consulting my faithful *Cuisinier français*, I decided upon a plain vegetable soup (ordinary Dutch vegetable soup) and then for safety's sake (you never could tell with a person like Torquemada) I thought we had



### THE ISLAND OF MIDDELBURG

1. Veere. 2. The Island of Walcheren. 3. Middelburg. 4. Vlissingen, or Flushing, as we call it. 5. The western Scheldt. 6. Borselen. 7. The Sloe. 8. Arnemuiden. 9. The eastern Scheldt. 10. Noord Beveland. 11. The Westgat. 12. The North Sea. 13. The Roompot. 14. Vrouwenpolder. 15. Domburg. 16. Westkapelle. 17. Breskens. 18. Zuid Beveland. 19. Canal from Veere to Middelburg. 20. Road from Veere to Middelburg. 21. Zoutelande

collaborator of the former member of the Committee of Public Safety. He had escaped to America or India. He had had all sorts of adventures, few of them pleasant. Now he felt that the end of his days were approaching. He must once more talk to some one who had been related to 'the noblest mind that ever lived' and then he could die in peace. He talked until the early hours of morning and then left after kneeling down before the portrait of his hero. A few hours later the gendarmerie would find his body hanging from the rafters of a mean room in a shabby hotel. Those were grim days. Those were terrible days. For the gods were on a gambling spree, and human lives were the stakes for which they played."

Maximilien was a very bright child. He was a little prig, and none of the other boys liked to play with him. He was excellent at his lessons and was quite willing to let others know it. He was brought up by his God-fearing aunts to become a good Christian, but their conception of the Christian virtues were those of middle-aged French spinsters. Life in that bleak house in that dull street in God-forsaken Arras must have been far from amusing. And, in order to save himself, Maximilien withdrew into a little dream castle of his own construction, a little castle on a little hill, but dominating the entire landscape. There he could feel himself superior to everybody else. He knew what was being said about him in the town—that he was not a legitimate child, that he had been the reason why his lawyer father had been forced to marry his plebeian mother. Within the walls of his little private stronghold people who whispered such things were at once thrown into a deep dungeon where they perished slowly, while the lord of the manor came down once in a while to look, through a small peephole in the door, at their agonies.

Some day that little castle would become a reality and grow into a very big and real castle, and the owner would become a very great man. So let us keep our secret thoughts to ourselves and prepare for a career.

Examinations meant nothing to Robespierre. He was born to take examinations and to pass them, too. The State needed bright lawyers, for the administration of France had become so complex that there had to be some kind of official for every twenty ordinary citizens. The Church, too, needed staunch, dependable supporters, for heresy was rife. It was a new kind of heresy which did not bother about religion in the stricter sense of the word, and therefore it was all the more difficult to combat.

This new creed had placed man instead of God in the centre of the universe. It even went so far as to preach man's divinity. This must inevitably lead to chaos, for with God deposed as the ruler of heaven and earth and all men regarded and treated as equals, what would become of authority—of the authority of the Pope, of the bishop, of the village priest?



Soon after his appointment Robespierre resigned. In his capacity as judge of the criminal court it would have been his duty to condemn a man to death. The idea of shedding another person's blood was too much for him. He withdrew. For he loved humanity. He loved humanity so much that he intended to make it happy. In order to make it happy, he must first of all make it perfect. That meant that he must re-create mankind after his own image.

During the first ten years of his public life Robespierre tried to achieve this purpose by peaceful means. Then he began to notice that most people were very obstinate when it came to having their vices replaced by virtues. This he could not tolerate. If his fellow-Frenchmen would not bend, then he would break them. And he lived up to his convictions. Before he himself had his jaw shot off, more people had died in consequence of his having scribbled his name at the bottom of a piece of paper than had during the reigns of the fourteenth, fifteenth, and sixteenth Louis.

That was quite an accomplishment for an obscure lawyer from a small provincial town. What interests me is the curious spiritual and emotional development of that kind of man with that kind of background who, in spite of all his natural disadvantages, was to put his imprint not only upon the history of France but also upon that of the whole civilized world.

I think it was Christian Friedrich Hebbel, the German tragedist of the first half of the last century, who favoured us with the curious theory that every great artist was a potential great criminal and *vice versa*. I have not given the matter much thought and, anyway, I am probably not bright enough to give you the answer.

Hebbel, like Spengler, is one of those writers you like to read because most of the time they make you so angry that you are stirred up to do a little independent thinking. Occasionally you say to yourself, "There at last they seem to have got something!" and you leave the beaten track of your own conventional method of reasoning to find out to what new conclusions their line of thought might lead. Sometimes you are left standing in unpleasant loneliness before a high and unscalable wall of pure nonsense. But occasionally you will discover a narrow gully through which you are able to crawl into an unsuspected realm of fresh speculations, and this idea that the creative artist is merely a criminal who has missed his real vocation and that a criminal is an artist in his approach to his unpleasant vocation—well, let me see!

According to the same Hebbel, Shakespeare, if he had not found an outlet in writing about murderers, would himself have turned highwayman and would have ended on the gibbet. But what was the criminal trying to prove when he told us about the world's great lovers?

friends hastily took me away and advised me to take the next train back to Holland. Otherwise I might fare badly and even be killed.

A century and a half ago, a similar unguarded remark about the Great Incorruptible of the French Revolution would have caused an identical reaction. For the virtuous ones take themselves very seriously.

Mirabeau, the exact opposite of Robespierre, an aristocrat by birth who had lustily plundered life of all its more delectable fruits and who knew his fellow-men from *A* to gizzard and then back again, listened to Robespierre just once and then summed him up in one single sentence which said about all there was to be said upon this unpleasant subject. "That nasty-looking, near-sighted lawyer from the little town in Picardy," he announced to his cronies, "will go very far: he actually believes everything he says."

Robespierre *did* go far, and here is a short outline of the last ten years of his life, for, after all, I shall need a few background facts so that you will be able to understand why it was possible for a man of such mediocre abilities to get as far as he did.

The future dictator of France began his career as a moderate. Like most Frenchmen of that pre-revolutionary epoch (and this cannot be stressed too often), he was a confirmed monarchist. It was not until long after that endless series of blunders and stupidities by which the King and his consort had alienated the affections of their loyal subjects that the word 'republic' began at last to be whispered about as the only way out of a situation that had become absolutely intolerable.

Even then the glamour that surrounded the throne was so enormous that when the famished mobs at last broke into the palace grounds of Versailles and sent a delegation of ordinary citizens—butchers, seamstresses, fish-wives, and professional cut-throats—to tell their Majesties that they must proceed to Paris and come and live "among their own people," three of these emissaries promptly fainted when at last they found themselves in the royal presence.

Robespierre, during these first years, was no exception to the general run of his fellow-members of the Constituent Assembly. France must be regenerated. Virtue must be re-established. The rights of the common people must be defined, and henceforth these must be respected. But woe unto him who would dare to lift a finger against the sacred person of the King, the highest embodiment of the law!

That was the first phase during which our hero often spoke, established a reputation more for his eloquence than for the soundness of his ideas, and remained just one among a thousand other legal luminaries who, like himself, had come to Versailles to save the fatherland by giving it a new

By far the best kings and emperors and Popes and even Presidents of the United States were those who were also good actors and who realized that the play is the thing and that there is a vast difference between actual life and life as represented on the stage. And, knowing their craft, they were always willing to listen to the advice of their stage managers, and the show would thereupon be a success.

England is perhaps the best example of what can be accomplished if the leading figures can be made to realize that they are but mummies, dressed up to represent certain symbols in the pageant of statecraft, but that they are not supposed to make up lines of their own as they go along or to add little bits of business that are not in the script. That undoubtedly is why the British crown has survived all those upheavals which have destroyed practically every other throne in Europe.

But in the France of the eighteenth century, as in the Russia of the twentieth, the poor hams who went about dressed up in the garments of State made the fatal mistake of thinking themselves called upon to act. They were under the erroneous impression that they themselves, instead of the crown they wore and the sceptre they carried and the ermine mantle that rested upon their shoulders, interested the populace and that it was before them personally that their subjects so humbly bowed their shaking knees. When at last some courageous courtier informed them of their error—and in a most tactful manner, too—and told them that they were supposed to content themselves with merely ornamental rôles and must leave the heavy acting to their Prime Ministers and councillors, they said no, they would not dream of doing such a thing. Their names appeared upon the programme in big black letters, and they insisted upon continuing as the stars of the performance.

Then cat-calls began to resound from the gallery, and over-ripe vegetables commenced to descend upon the stage, and there were unseemly scenes outside the royal entrance when the performers left to go home.

Did all this remain unnoticed in the ancient kingdom of France? By no means. For more than three generations it had been practically the only topic of conversation. All the brightest minds were thinking overtime, trying to find a solution. Whole libraries were being filled with books and pamphlets suggesting methods by which lamentable conditions could possibly be improved. All the available knowledge of the whole civilized world, presented from the 'new' point of view—the point of view, emphatically laid down by Descartes, that only "seeing is believing"—was gathered together in the famous encyclopedia of Diderot and d'Alembert, Voltaire, Rousseau, and the other philosophers and pseudo-philosophers of the last half of the eighteenth century.

Even the clergy, who as a rule showed little direct interest in matters of

he must first of all find an instrument with which he could force his will upon his opponents. Such an instrument was not to be found in the sleepy city of Versailles, still dominated by the guards of the royal palace. Neither could he make an appeal to the whole of the French nation. The country was too large and was still too much divided in its opinions to act as a unit. Every province was still the enemy of every other, and there was only one group that could be drilled and disciplined into a concrete army of opposition, ready and able to follow the bidding of its leader.

That was a group of the disinherited people who dwelled miserably in the Paris slums. Badly housed, badly fed, badly clothed, disregarded and neglected for hundreds of years, but now at last beginning to realize their own strength, those unfortunate men and women were only waiting for some one to place himself at their head and give them a chance to avenge themselves for the centuries of oppression and maltreatment they had endured.

Long before anyone else was bright enough to understand this, Robespierre recognized the fact that these ill-disciplined hordes, if properly handled, could be made to serve the purposes of revolution or at least his kind of revolution.

As a preliminary step Robespierre became a member of the Commune of Paris. At first he kept himself discreetly in the background. His hour had not yet come. There still was a lot of preparatory work to be done, but it is characteristic of the men of his type that they are usually able to proceed very slowly and know how to bide their time, where other more impetuous people would rush ahead and spoil their chances and get themselves in trouble.

Also with an eye to the future, he had joined one of the most radical political organizations—a sort of eighteenth-century Tammany Hall, called the Club of the Jacobins, because it held its meetings in a cloister which had formerly belonged to the Jacobins, the name by which the Parisians had always known the order of the Dominicans. Originally, this organization had been a small affair, founded by a few Breton members of the Constituent Assembly. They had feared (and rightly so) that the Government intended to let the Assembly meet and talk and talk and meet until the nation should have grown tired of these endless debates, when the Government could step in and say, "In this way nothing will ever be accomplished," could send the orators about their business, and then once more could inaugurate a strong-arm policy which must lead to the re-establishment of the absolute monarchy of former times.

These shrewd Bretons had come to the conclusion that the Constituent Assembly could never amount to anything until the people of France should have been sufficiently aroused to realize the issues at stake. But

the extremists. They were the Bolsheviks of the great French Revolution, just as the Girondists and the Feuillants were the Mensheviks. Benjamin Franklin might have felt at home among the Girondists, while Sam Adams of Boston would surely have raged among the Jacobins, spurring them on to ever and ever greater efforts to rid the country of its tyrants.

That was the general lay-out of French political life as long as the King and Queen were still playing bezique in Versailles. And now let us see how Robespierre set to work to make himself master of the situation.

In order to do so he had to play a rôle—a rôle so simple that everybody at all times could see him and hear him, applaud him, and follow him. He therefore endeavoured to make himself the embodiment of civic virtue. That would give him an opportunity to denounce all those who opposed him as traitors, for all he had to do was to accuse them of being lacking in that most praiseworthy quality.

Perhaps Hebbel was right, after all. Perhaps every great statesman and every great leader is at heart an artist. In the case of Robespierre, his histrionic genius manifested itself within the field of the drama. For the Revolution from then on became a tragedy, with Maximilien taking the rôle of the star.

Robespierre's first great opportunity came during the debate upon the foreign policy of the kingdom of France. This happened after the Constituent Assembly had been dissolved to make room for the more practical Legislative Assembly, which was to give France its new form of government. The Girondists and the more moderate elements were in favour of a foreign war. A foreign war, so they reasoned, would unite the hopelessly divided French people and turn them into a nation inspired by a common will to conquer or to die. Therefore, let France declare war upon all European tyrannies and let her battalions march forth to carry the blessings of liberty, equality, and fraternity to all the world.

The Jacobins strongly opposed such a plan. They knew that the court also hoped for a war, for then, in case of victory, the Austrian and German armies would give short shrift to the rabble which now kept the royal children awake with their unseemly ravings right underneath the windows of the palace. And Marie Antoinette was using every opportunity to encourage her Austrian relations to do just that—to mobilize and rush to her defence and break the power of the Revolution.

Within the Legislative Assembly the radical members—almost all of them Jacobins—had preferred to take the seats high up along the walls. That is why they were called the Mountaineers, or, for short, the Mountain. The Feuillants gradually disappeared from the scene. It then became a struggle between the moderates, or the Plain, because they

Empire. He excused himself to answer a telephone call. The moment he put down the receiver he threw both hands towards heaven in a gesture of despair. "They are hopeless," he said. "Will they never learn? That was the Queen of Spain at the Meurice. She asked me to send one of my *vendeuses* to the hotel as fast as I could. Her Majesty wants a few new dresses. Yesterday she lost her kingdom. The first thing she thinks of the moment she is safe in Paris is a few new dresses. Will they never learn?"

I answered, "Probably not," and he replied, "No! They never will."

Marie Antoinette was a sister under the skin of the last of the Spanish queens. She was fleeing for her life and she must have known that it was her last chance. But she must have her hair fixed by her own coiffeur. This loquacious creature had, of course, been unable to keep his mouth shut. Wherever he had stopped, in order to make himself important, he had hinted at certain other personages who would soon follow him—friends of his—and: "Ah, if only you knew who they are, then wouldn't you be surprised!"

His listeners were more curious than surprised. Stories about the possibility of a flight of the royal couple had been circulated for weeks. Now it appeared that, after all, there was something in those rumours! Everywhere all good Jacobins began to look for a mysterious travelling-coach carrying the royal couple towards the frontier.

The rest of Fersen's beautiful plan was botched by the King. A terrific gourmand (there was little of the gourmet about him), he must have his meals at the regularly appointed hours. He insisted upon stopping for a little snack, for it was getting late and there was no telling when he would have another opportunity at a juicy leg of chicken. The royal barouche was halted. The village was awakened by the noise of a foreign family loudly clamouring for food. A few clever citizens put two and two together. They thought that this so-called Austrian baron bore a striking resemblance to the King's effigy on the coins in their pockets. They began to ask questions. Some one rang the church bells. The whole neighbourhood, fearing that the Austrians had come to murder them, got mobilized. And early the next morning, the King, still eating chicken legs out of his picnic basket, was on his way back to his capital. So was the Queen. So were the royal children.

After that, as every good Frenchman asked his neighbour, how could anyone ever again trust this miserable Austrian woman and her stupid husband? But the realization of how nearly this plot had succeeded set loose such a panic and caused such an outburst of fury at the treason of the Capet family (for everybody now referred to his Majesty as the Citizen Capet, the original name of the dynasty) that the fate of both the King and the Queen was sealed.

anything that happened during the first outbreaks of violence. But from behind the scenes he helped to spread that panic which swept over France when the attempted flight of the royal family, the organization of an army of refugees in the Rhine region, and rumours of fifth-column activities among the remaining nobles had begun to make people expect to find a spy underneath every bed and a traitor hidden in every cupboard.

Meanwhile, the organization of a nation-wide counter-attack in the form of terror—of wholesale murder and wholesale executions—was entrusted to another obscure young lawyer, a certain Georges Jacques Danton. Like Robespierre, Danton had realized that the Revolution could not be won without the support of an armed force and that that armed force lay ready at hand in the slums of Paris. But for the rest there was nothing in common between these two leaders. For Danton loved his women, his food, his wine, and everything else that life offered to a young man whose health was indestructible, whose appetites were insatiable, and who was profoundly conscious of his ability to dominate his fellow-citizens by means of his spectacular gifts as a rabble-rouser.

Danton despised the sickly Robespierre, who spent several hours every day swathing his inflamed legs in flannel bandages, who did not appear at the club until his barber had put a last touch on his severely fashionable wig, who never indulged in intoxicating beverages (lovely phrase, so dear to the hearts of all pure souls!), who worked for hours over every page of his interminable speeches, about whom there was not a single story to connect him with a member of the opposite sex, and who, wherever he went, enveloped himself in a cloak of self-righteous virtue. There was not a grain of self-righteousness in Danton, and virtue in his eyes was something that was all right for his aunts in the old home-town in Champagne. As for him, life was there to be enjoyed with all the senses—and a curse upon this miserable Pharisee who always made you feel conscious of your own shortcomings.

However, for the moment the two needed each other. They carefully hid the knives they hoped some day to stick into each other's backs, and while Robespierre, who was the more careful and cautious of the two, agitated behind the scenes, Danton was allowed to rush out in front and stem the tide of defeat by a series of exploits which will for ever associate his name with that of some of the world's most successful assassins, except that he took no personal delight in seeing his victims being sent to their fate. He was much too fond of life to deny others the same rights he claimed for himself.

This is a pretty serious indictment, and I should therefore add that Danton also was a devoted patriot and that like all good Frenchmen he detested a lack of logic. It irritated him when other Frenchmen refused

and France was declared a republic. The Christian chronology was abolished as a useless relic of a bygone age. September 22 of the year 1792 became the first day of the year of the new era. In December began the King's trial. He was found guilty and was duly executed in January of the year 1793. It was the first time in almost a century and a half that such a thing had happened—that an anointed personage had perished on the scaffold. Europe was so horrified that Austria, England, Prussia, Holland, and Spain actually forgot their conflicting interests long enough to start a common campaign against the long-pantalooned monsters who had dared to lay hands on the descendant of St Louis and had rudely dispatched him to heaven.

Once again France heard herself denounced as the enemy of mankind, and emissaries of the Church began to find their way to Brittany and the Vendée, where a few simple peasants still believed in God and in the divine right of their masters to plunder them in the name of authority. These poor Vendéans started a rebellion in the north. General Dumouriez, who, if he had had the courage to march on Paris, could have sent all the Jacobins about their business (the majority of the French people still felt horrified at the legal murder of their King), but who lacked the moral strength to take this bold step, had sold out to the Austrians. Panic once more stalked through the streets of Paris. Once more the time had come to unloose terror.

On March 9, 1793, a revolutionary tribunal was established in Paris. This court did not bother about either witnesses or lawyers, and its sense of justice was not tempered by mercy. It either set free or condemned to death, usually the latter. And a month later France became a dictatorship. A Committee of Public Safety, composed of nine men, soon afterwards increased to twelve, took charge of the affairs of State.

Both Danton and Robespierre were among its members. From that moment on it was the tail that wagged the dog. Paris ruled France, and Paris in turn was ruled by the worst element of its highly cosmopolitan society—the crackpots, the degenerates, the seemingly inspired but hopelessly impractical visionaries, the theorists who knew life only from the pages of their pamphlets, the pimps and their lady loves, the renegade aristocrats and the unfrocked priests. Anyone who was out of tune with the world, anyone who thought himself a great thinker but who had been condemned to years in the sewers by the indifference of his fellow-men, anyone who had a grievance against a universe which had not treated him as he knew he had deserved to be treated—all these poor physical and moral and spiritual derelicts now found themselves in a position to exercise authority.

*"Allons, enfants de la patrie!"* The day of the Great Revenge had come.



the army, of raising the necessary money in a state that was so hopelessly bankrupt that the francs were no longer worth the paper on which they were printed, of establishing wages and the price of all commodities, of creating order out of chaos, and, as a side-line, of constructing a modern centralized nation out of the ruins of a hopelessly outworn feudal state in which every province, every town, and every hamlet had been a semi-independent unit with its own tax system, its own dialect, its own caste system, its own customs and habits, and its own set of laws.

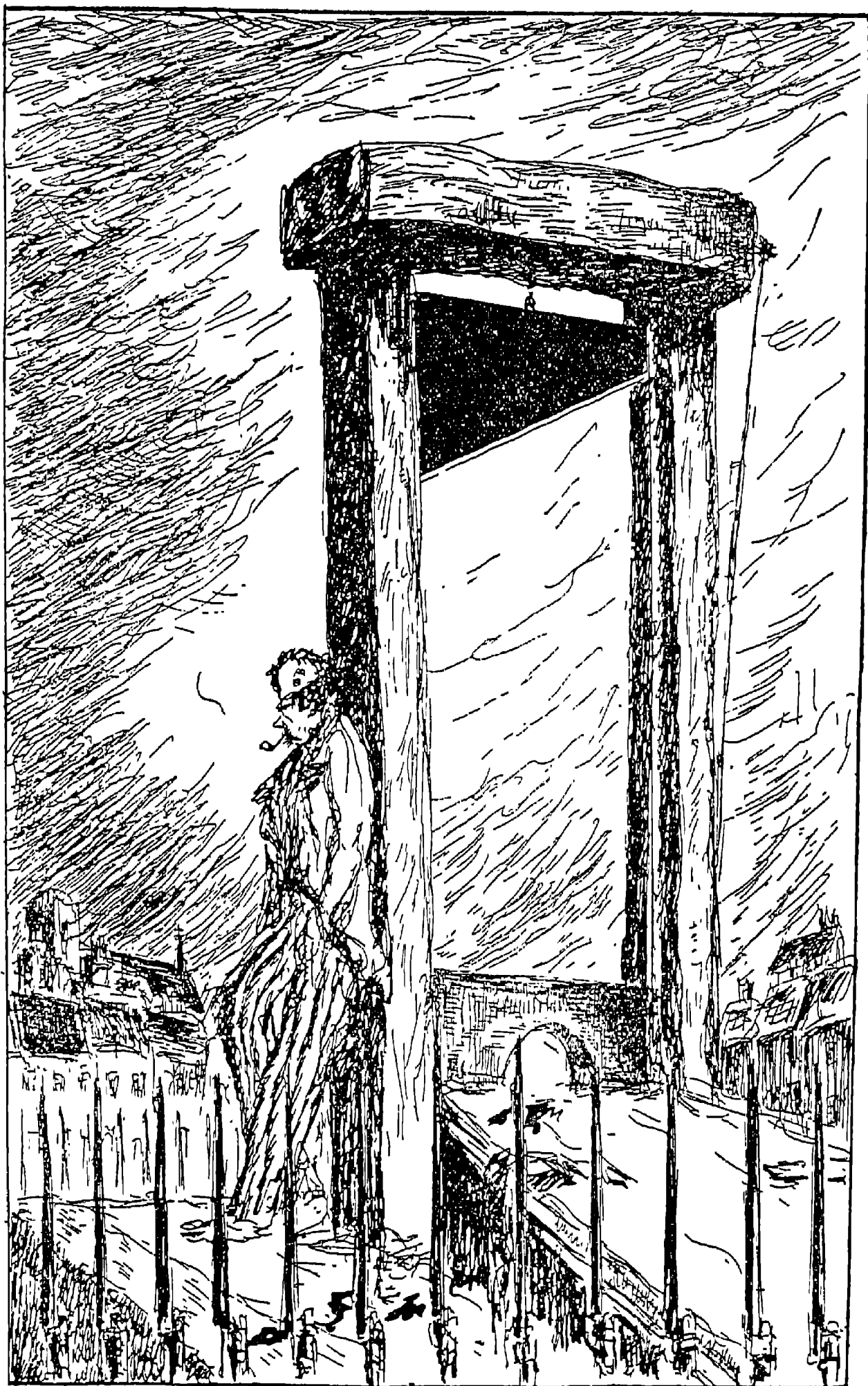
With the indefatigable Carnot looking after the practical sides of life, Robespierre could at last devote himself wholeheartedly to the business of giving the Revolution that ideal twist which was to turn it into the greatest moral experiment of the ages and which was to make Christianity look like the amateur effort of a well-meaning Jewish prophet who had not quite known how to handle the situation.

First of all, a lesson had to be taught to those misguided Vendéan peasants who still fought the battalions of the French Republic and who marched into battle carrying pictures of their saints. Between October and December they were almost completely annihilated. A revolutionary tribunal was established at Nantes. It condemned more than fifteen thousand persons to death. That was too large a number to shoot or to hang, for the bankrupt Republic could ill afford so much gunpowder and rope. So the victims were loaded on barges and then dumped into the rivers and drowned. If their relatives walked far enough downstream, they could fish out their bodies and give them Christian burial. The Republic was too busy to bother about that detail.

In October Marie Antoinette was brought before her judges, and, after one of the most degrading trials in history, during which a serious effort was made to force her small son to accuse his mother of illicit sexual intercourse with her own child, she was condemned to death. The details of her execution, the unspeakable horror of her last few hours on earth, made no doubt a pleasant subject of conversation at the dinner-table of the Duplay family, where the virtuous Maximilien lived when he was in town and where he became almost human enough to ask for the hand, in virtuous matrimony, of the eldest daughter, Éléonore, whose steadfast loyalty to her hero was so great that she might have served as a model for Beethoven's heroine in *Fidelio*.

Anyway, things were happening. The Queen was gone, and less than two years later her small son was to disappear, probably dying as the result of the neglect he had suffered while being boarded out with the family of a drunken shoemaker.

On the last day of October of the year 1793 twenty-one Girondists, the



LIBERTY, FRATERNITY, EQUALITY

willing to look the other way while the lunatic fringe did its best to discredit everything connected with the rule of the late Citizen Louis Capet.

This feeling of amused indifference was not at all shared by him whom Carlyle called the "sea-green Incorruptible," for Robespierre, who suffered from chronic constipation, had the unhealthy pallor of all such patients, though it never, as far as we know, changed from white to green. This is another interesting point to which I should draw your attention.

Robespierre, in spite of his indifference about human suffering, was at heart a very religious person, and, because he was painfully lacking in a sense of the ludicrous, he could not for the life of him understand why all this tomfoolery of the Clootses and their disciples should so greatly amuse Danton and his set of friends. This juggling with the eternal verities disgusted him profoundly, and he decided that the sooner it came to an end, the better it would be for that holy cause of true virtue. And so, while still maintaining an outward semblance of cordiality towards his colleagues in the Convention and Committee of Public Safety, he once more got busy with his little notebooks.

Robespierre had by this time learned the value of the element of surprise. He therefore waited while he set his traps. He sprang them in the spring of the next year, 1794.

Before they knew what had happened, all the more radical elements of the Commune—Cloots and his friends and, worst of all, Danton and his adherents—found themselves in prison. From there they were dispatched to the scaffold with such indecent haste that most of them were dead before they had quite realized how it had all come about. Except Danton, who, being a natural-born actor, had turned his trial and execution into an act of such sublime dramatic quality that even Robespierre must have experienced a few moments of discomfort. But these did not last very long. The conviction that he had acted the only way a virtuous citizen could possibly have acted quickly consoled him for the loss of all his former friends and colleagues whom he now had sent so brutally to their doom.

Besides, there was too much to do to waste time upon one's private feelings. First of all, the people of France must be led back to the pathways of Truth. That was easy. A resolution was offered in the Convention whereby that august body declared itself to be in favour of the existence of a Supreme Being. The resolution was passed, and God was once more reinstated on his heavenly throne.

To bring this joyful fact to the attention of all the people, June 8 was dedicated to an official feast in honour of the Supreme Being. That probably was the happiest day in the life of Maximilien Robespierre. Like that other historical figure who resembles him in so many ways (Adolf

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street with a kitchen knife in her possession—on that very same day a man with quite a reputation as a practical joker must get up in the Convention and inquire—oh, so politely—to what extent the President of the Committee of Public Safety had been implicated in the affair of the Mother of God.

That question, of course, was absurd, and it should never have been allowed to be asked. The Mother of God to whom reference was made was a crazy old cook who lived in a garret and who had gradually surrounded herself with a small group of devoted worshippers who believed in her sacred mission, called her the Mother of God, and prayed with her for the second coming of the Son. There was nothing very exciting about the revelations made by the police about the existence of such an organization as the Followers of the Mother of God, and in ordinary circumstances nobody would have worried about the identification card which Robespierre had signed for the old lady as head of the ward in which both of them happened to live. Such cards, guaranteeing the bearer to be a good patriot, were part of the daily routine of every citizen of the Reign of Terror. They were about as impersonal as car licences, and what Robespierre wanted to know was how this harmless document had ever got into the hands of the noisy and alcoholic Gascon who was now asking embarrassing questions about the Virtuous Leader and the Mother of God in the Convention. He knew that it was being done to discredit him and make him look ridiculous, but who was behind this move?

In happy anticipation of soon being enlightened upon this point, Robespierre first settled the fate of the Mother of God. She and her disciples—a motley collection of kitchen slaveys, scullery-maids, a poor ex-priest who had lost his reason as a result of seeing a batch of his fellow-clerics murdered before his own eyes, and several dozen others of the same sort—were condemned in haste and decapitated in a hurry. A few months before such a drastic measure would have been sufficient to put an end to all further rumours. But not this time!

For now wherever the Virtuous One goes he hears half-stifled whispers accompanied by happy giggles: “Look! There goes the friend of the Mother of God!”

In these circumstances why not disappear for a couple of weeks? The people of Paris are short-memoried, and when one comes back the matter will have been completely forgotten.

Also—another good idea—take daily walks with one’s fiancée, the charming Éléonore Duplay, to silence those voices which have been hinting that the great man might perhaps be a bit ‘queer’ in his attitude towards the other sex. Another important item, never to be forgotten. After you have returned from your little holiday, be very much of the

good behaviour, has been driven to the point of despair where he may try to kill you. Get up in meeting and solemnly declare him to be "outside the law" before he can take any counter-measures. Next let your short-sighted eyes scan the pages of your little paper-covered book and hint in an ominous tone of voice that there are a few others whom in your own good time you will be obliged to bring before the bar of justice. You have done it often. It never failed to work, but this time, something must have slipped up somewhere. There is sudden commotion, the brandishing of knives in the best classical style, shouts of "Down with the tyrant!" references to the Ides of March, all of which you will answer with a renewed gesture in the direction of your tell-tale little book.

And then—and nobody will ever know exactly how it came about—but suddenly you yourself have been declared "outside the law," the soldiers of the Convention have disarmed the armed rabble in the galleries, and you and your faithful brother, Augustin, and all your most trusted fellow-members of the Committee of Public Safety, are prisoners and at the mercy of the Convention and of that man whose lady love from her gaol continues to send him little notes bearing but the single word "Coward."

For a few moments at least he has not been a coward, but then the fear of what he has dared to do, that fear which all the people in France feel before the name of the Great Incorruptible, once more lames his efforts. The denizens of the slums have heard what has happened to their hero—their saint. They ring the tocsin. They grab their pikes and axes. They storm the building in which their beloved leader is being detained. They set him free and carry him and his friends in triumph to the Town Hall.

Now at last the conspirators of the Convention realize that everything is at stake. It is either Robespierre's life or their own. Their soldiers are hastily mobilized. The Committee of Public Safety orders the general commanding the troops of the Commune to march to their rescue. The brave general collects his men, draws his sword, and falls off his horse. It is a case of *delirium tremens*, and the ex-brewer, now known as the King of the Faubourgs, the man who has conducted Louis to the guillotine and has prevented the poor King from making a short speech of farewell by ordering the drums to be rolled, he is out of the picture, sleeping his drunkenness off on the floor of a near-by tavern.

Also it begins to rain—it begins to pour as it has rarely rained and poured in Paris either before or after that terrible night of the ninth of Thermidor (July 27 to the rest of the world). Frenchmen do not like to get wet. The soldiers of the Commune are Frenchmen and so they decide to stay at home and attend to this matter of rescuing their beloved leader

cart. See him? They say he tried to kill himself. Let us find out whether he can still hear us.

"Robespierre—you monster—you swine—you dirty son of a dog—we hope you roast in hell for all eternity. Look, he can still move his eyes—he must be alive—once more and now all together! Robespieeeeeerre! you piece of . . ." for the most cultivated nation of our planet can descend to pretty low depths of vulgarity once it gets aroused.

Then darkness again. Until strong hands lift you brutally from the bottom of that familiar cart (the same cart that has taken most of your old friends to their death) in which you had taken your last ride on earth. An ocean of faces gaping at you, shouting words which you can no longer make out, but there is no doubt about their meaning. Two other hands on your shoulders, pushing you down on a plank dripping with the blood of those who preceded you. And then, a howl of inhuman pain, which comes out of your own mouth, or what is left of it. The executioner has torn away the bandage which held the upper and lower parts of your jaw together. You can no longer see the faces. You only hear a hurricane of bestial joy as the axeman reaches for the lever that will set the engine of justice into motion.

The crowd roars, "There he goes!" And there you went. Your head with the now uncontrollable eyes rolling wildly drops into the basket.

"Next."

Your head now is no longer alone. It has company.

"Next."

It has still more company.

"Next."

When the nineteenth head has rolled into it the basket is getting a little crowded. "Take it away," says Monsieur Sanson, senior, to the Messieurs Sanson, junior, "and bring me an empty one. We will have a lot more of them, to-morrow morning early." In which that faithful servant of the Republic was very much right. The next day there were half a hundred more friends of the Incorruptible One. The next day thirty. And so it went until everybody who had in any way been connected with the Man of Virtue had been disposed of.

Then France sat down, said "Zoof!" or "*Là là!*" according to the social status of the speakers, and went to a picnic. The forests were as lovely as ever. The girls and women once more could smile. The grass was as green as ever. The cold chicken was as delicious as ever. The wine tasted even better than before. God was once more in His heaven, or almost, and the mortal remains of Maximilien Robespierre were lying in a bed of quicklime, his head neatly disposed between his legs, for that was the way it had been decreed by his own Committee of Public Safety:

retribution, then still part of everybody's mental make-up, may have had something to do with this outward indifference exhibited by almost all the patients. They had their hands hacked off and stood there looking curiously at the blood-spouting wrists (our Middelburg artist was excellent at drawing streams of blood spurting from necks and hands and legs of the poor victims, and he apparently knew a lot about the law of ballistics, for his curves were almost always correct).

These murderers and highwaymen had their bowels cut open and took it as unconcernedly as a patient in a modern hospital who is having some abdominal operation performed with a rectal anæsthetic. He sees everything but feels nothing. And this may be the answer to the question I just asked myself.

The people of those bygone days took such incidents as being broken on the rack for granted in the same mood in which we of the twentieth century take our operations for granted. They are inevitably accompanied by a certain amount of temporary discomfort, but they are all in the day's work, and in the end we will be much better off for them.

It was therefore with some astonishment that I studied this diarist's last three entries, which covered the years 1506, 1509, and 1511. They had to do with burnings at the stake. But, instead of standing unconcernedly in the midst of the flames and mumbling a final prayer, these heretics were angrily waving their fists at a couple of near-by officials, and in the distance one noticed a certain amount of unrest among the spectators, who in all the other pictures had been as docile as the crowds at a movie and who undoubtedly were enjoying the show in very much the same way in which a modern audience contemplates a scene of celluloid horror imported from one of the countries where civil war is raging.

The old cleric's script was quite illegible to me, but my good friend, the keeper of the archives, who read those pothooks with the same ease with which Jimmie deciphers my manuscripts, translated the lines for me, and so I learned that the 'unseemly behaviour of the mob' on those occasions had been due to resentment that the executions were being held at the request of the Spanish Inquisition.

As you may remember, the Church never killed anyone. It merely found people guilty and then left the further painful details to the secular arm. And as long as all this was done by the local magistrates, the populace had offered no serious objections. But when the word "Inquisition" began to be whispered round—usually in connexion with the name of Spain—then there were unmistakable signs of discontent and even threats of open rebellion.

We usually forget how recently the last of these executions took place. In Spain the Inquisition as an instrument of domination over people's



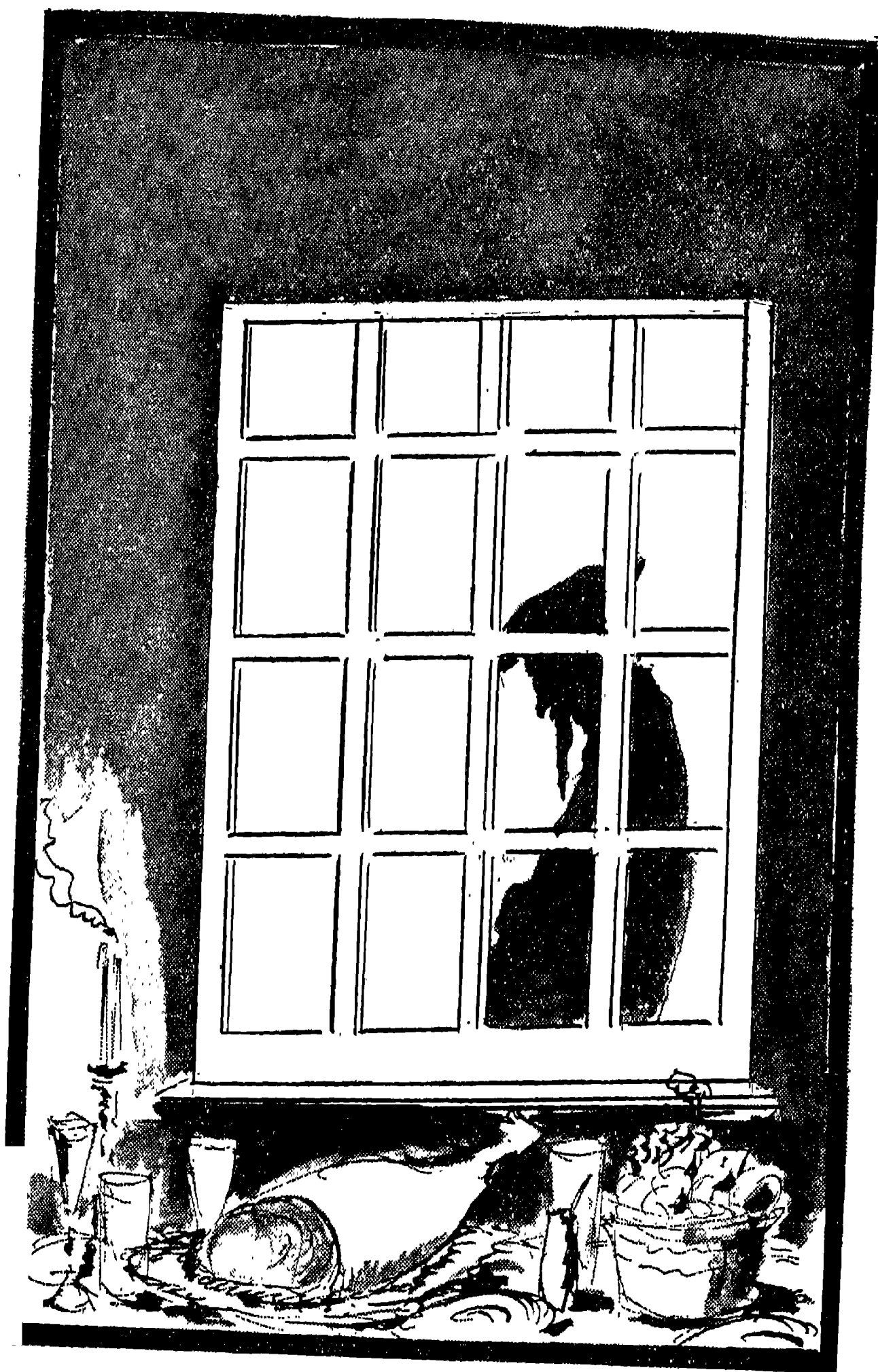
minds was not abolished until the year 1834. Torture in forcing confessions from suspected prisoners and as a means of refreshing the memories of recalcitrant witnesses continued in its courts until 1816, and in Mexico the Inquisition flourished until about the same time, and even afterwards there were outbreaks of inquisitorial zeal in many of the former Spanish colonies. But in northern Europe the people, although in many ways just as cruel as their southern neighbours, have always resented the use of physical violence to bring about purely spiritual results.

Yes, I know Calvin did torture and burn a most learned and respected scientist who disagreed with him concerning the true nature of the Trinity. And during the first years of the Dutch rebellion against Spain the rabble would go in for an occasional outburst of lynching, and several dozen priests were sacrificed to their lust for revenge. But by and large such incidents were severely repressed because the greater part of the community held them in deep horror.

It is claimed that in Sweden the Reformation took place without a single life being lost. The record in the other countries of northern Europe is not quite so good, but even so, it is infinitely better than that of the south. Most people accepted some sort of watch-and-ward society, as we ourselves accept committees of Congressional and civic snoopers who look into the beliefs of our school-teachers, lest Karl Marx be suddenly discovered in the inkstand of the principal or the teachers be seen riding broomsticks (made in Moscow) through the fresh air of night (made in Pittsburgh). Unless such committees are so lacking in intelligence or behave so outrageously that they get into the public eye, nobody bothers very much about them, and neither did the people of the Low Countries feel restless as long as the Inquisition had been composed of members of their own race. But when its administration was handed over to foreigners, mostly Spaniards, then there was trouble, and that is easy to understand. For in Spain, unlike in most other countries, the religious troubles were intermingled with racial troubles, and when that happens, the devil comes into his own!

During the eighth century Spain had been overrun by the Mohammedans, and for more than six hundred years the Spaniards had spent practically all their energies upon the task of driving out the foreign invaders. They finally succeeded in doing so, but then they found themselves presented with a new problem that just could not be settled.

It has often happened that when one race has conquered another, it is the superior race (from a cultural point of view) which loses. Most modern historians seem to agree that the Moors were in practically every aspect of life superior to their Christian masters. They were better scientists, better physicians, better merchants and navigators. They knew



THE SPIRIT OF JOHN CALVIN WAS EVER WITH US

And so there remained no other choice but to try and get hold of the wealth of their Moorish fellow-citizens, and what was a more profitable and satisfactory way of accomplishing their downfall than by accusing these poor Moriscos of being backsliders and heretics?

That is why the Spanish Inquisition enjoyed such widespread popularity and was regarded by most Spaniards as the one institution which could still save their country (and themselves) from bankruptcy. For from then on no man with a drop of foreign blood in his veins, however rich or powerful, was safe from an accusation of being lacking in that *limpieza*—that purity of blood which to-day is the sword that hangs over the head of every non-Aryan in Germany. The mere suspicion of having had a Jewish or Moorish grandfather or grandmother was enough to bring the poor victim in contact with the officers of the Inquisition. Torture and prolonged imprisonment would do the rest, and at the next *auto-da-fé* (those sanguinary ‘acts of faith’ at which often as many as fifty victims were burned together to the greater glory of God) still another nest of Morisco families was wiped out and their property was confiscated for the benefit of the Christian community.

As these bloody persecutions did not stop at subjects of the Spanish crown but quite frequently sent *bona fide* foreigners to their death, the Inquisition soon dragged the country into serious difficulties with almost every nation of northern Europe. This led to complications abroad and to the loss of still more colonies, and in the end this policy became one of the contributory causes of Spain’s downfall.

It is always rather difficult for the contemporaries of such great events to get a very clear conception of what is actually happening. This time, however, the general detestation in which the Spanish Inquisition was held by all foreign nations—the obstinate refusal of the Dutch to tolerate its introduction into their own country—the panic that swept across England when it was whispered that Queen Mary, after contracting matrimony with King Philip, would permit her husband’s Inquisition to establish itself on British soil—this wholesale outbreak of horror shows us that our great-great-grandfathers were clearly aware of what Spanish Inquisition implied. It meant an end to all those things for which both the English and the Dutch had so bitterly fought for so many years. It meant a return to those unfortunate aspects of the Middle Ages of which those people were trying to rid themselves. And although they might disagree with each other upon a thousand different subjects, upon one point they were in complete harmony—better to die than to submit to this menace of foreign domination.

with a castle or a pigsty flying his flag dared defy the King's royal majesty. As for money, there was none. Not even the few thousand dollars necessary to finance the Italian adventurer who swore that by sailing due west he could reach the Indies and Japan in less than three weeks, and make everybody rich.

Torquemada, who understood the situation much better than most of the other royal councillors, thought that he knew how the problem could be solved. Let him be appointed Inquisitor-General, and unity would soon be established, while ducats would begin to flow into the royal exchequer by the tens of millions.

Has there ever been a royal family which refused an offer to enrich itself at the expense of its subjects? Yes, there have been such historical curiosities, but not during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when a divine prerogative was usually interpreted as a very worldly permit to plunder.

So, after some argument with the Holy See, permission was obtained to go ahead. Even then the Pope had serious misgivings about the plan. Previous experience had shown how much harm that kind of private enterprise within the realm of heresy-hunting might do to the good name of the Church and how difficult it was to call the Dominicans—the Dogs of the Lord—back, once they had been let loose and were out of control. But Spain was one of the Holy See's most devoted children and entitled to a few favours.

In 1481 the Spanish Inquisition, reorganized after the Torquemada pattern, began to function. First of all, it descended upon Seville, which had been one of the centres of the old Moorish culture and was therefore held to be a hotbed of racial impurities and heresies. In the middle of the thirteenth century it had been definitely captured by the Spaniards, and almost half a million Moslems had fled, though enough of them had remained behind to make them a 'problem,' provided you were looking for one.

Torquemada was doing exactly that. There was gold in those old Moorish mansions, and he meant to get it. Once more, those who could escape left the city and left in a hurry. The others were forced to submit to a most careful inquiry into their orthodoxy. The vital statistics relating to Torquemada's activities during the fifteen years that he was Inquisitor-General are very contradictory. In the year 1792, almost three centuries after his death, a secretary of the Holy Office (what strange institutions have borne the name 'holy'!) published some figures upon the subject which he claimed were based upon the official records in the archives. He reached a total of ten thousand people burned and seven thousand others burned in effigy, for those who had made good their escape were

into the royal treasury each year? That gave Torquemada the opportunity to deliver himself of a couple of noble lines.

"God have mercy upon us all!" he complained with menacing mien. "God have mercy upon us all! Judas betrayed his Master for thirty pieces of silver, and your Majesties now intend to sell your Saviour for ten thousand times that amount!"

When their Inquisitor-General spoke that way, there was only one thing their Majesties could do. They gave in, and three months after the fall of Granada, all Jews in Spain found themselves faced with the choice of being baptized or of leaving the country with the loss of all their possessions.

A few months later another edict followed. No Christian must have any dealings with a Jew. No Christian must be seen speaking to a Jew. Any Christian woman caught in the act of offering food to a starving Jewish child would have to expiate her crime on the scaffold. With the fatal result that between a million and a million and a half Jewish families left Spain. They were not allowed to take anything away with them except the clothes on their backs. But if they survived the brutalities of their guards and the deprivations on board the vessels that carried them into exile, then it was discovered that they had quite unconsciously deprived Spain of the one commodity it needed most of all.

I refer to their brains. For those ingenious Hebrew brains were then set to work not merely to regain some basis of financial security for their owners, but also to do as much damage as possible to their former torturers. And the countries of northern Europe are there as concrete proof of the inestimable benefits which that kind of immigration bestowed upon the nations that were wise enough to welcome those unfortunate victims of racial and religious intolerance.

It often took a little time for the newcomers to fit into their unfamiliar surroundings. But as soon as that difficult feat had been accomplished, these refugees became assets of immeasurable worth. Their international business relations were of immense value to their adopted countries. Their genius for business, their almost instinctive feeling for certain types of commercial transactions which until then had been virtually unknown in northern Europe, where the merchant was only too apt to take the short view of the Middle Ages instead of risking his capital in long-view speculations—all this helped to make London and Amsterdam the centres of the New Capitalism.

Their gift for diagnosis, for clever guessing, placed the Jews in the front ranks of the great physicians. On the negative side, there was the narrow-minded and intolerant conservatism of many of their spiritual leaders and the insistence of many of the refugees upon carrying at least

Let me state right away that we were not in the least disappointed. Both Robespierre and Torquemada lived up to our worst expectations. No, they did not behave like our two sad relics from the Council of Nicæa. On the contrary, they were so absolutely correct in everything they said and did that they lacked all spontaneity.

They both appeared at the same time, at three minutes past seven, so as to make a proper entrance, I suppose. Then they both excused themselves for being "a few minutes late" and told us how happy they were at having been invited. And then they sat down and stared into the fire and said nothing. But not for very long, for soon I noticed that Torquemada was showing signs of restlessness. He looked this way and that and even examined the dark spot behind the staircase as if he feared that some unseen enemy was on the watch for him. Next he picked up the heavy poker—a very old one—perhaps Gothic—which Frits had found at Bal's store in Middelburg and had bought because it was such a magnificent piece of iron. After that he appeared to be a little more at his ease, and a few minutes later he began to poke the fire.

The moment he did so both Frits and I became aware of a change that took place in the room. I can't quite describe it, for nothing really happened. The walls did not move down upon us; the ceiling remained in its place. But it looked to both of us as if the fireplace had suddenly become full of little figures, tiny little men and women helplessly lifting their arms towards heaven, twisting their bodies in tortured agony, and silently imploring a mercy they knew would not be granted. The contortion of their faces was something terrible to behold, and their hair, standing on end and sending off fiery sparks, added a final touch of horror.

At the same time from the beams above our heads the limp bodies of a great number of men and women and even a few children began to sway slowly in the draught caused by the opening of the door that led from the kitchen to the dining-room, for Jo was entering with the soup plates. She too stopped in her tracks, said, "God help us all!" and dropped all the crockery on the floor with a bang that made both Frits and me jump up from our chairs as if hit by lightning. Apparently we had not been dreaming. Jo too had seen what we had seen. It was going to be a pleasant evening!

Jo returned with a new set of dishes. We sat down to dinner, and the soup was served. Not a word was spoken. Then, during the main course, Robespierre suddenly reached into the inner pocket of his coat, a garment of good material and fashionable cut, in the style of a hundred and fifty years ago, made of blue and white striped silk and showing signs of elaborate care. "Good Lord!" I said to myself. "He is going to put



TORQUEMADA POKES THE FIRE



ROBESPIERRE HAD MADE HIMSELF A LITTLE GUILLOTINE





THE BIRDS HAD COME TO HEAR ST FRANCIS PREACH

[See page 343]

Assisi was not quite a metropolis, but in the year 1181 two thousand inhabitants gave an overgrown village the right to call itself a town. Furthermore, it had walls and towers and all the other attributes of a regular city, including a foreign policy of its own where its neighbours were concerned. Occasionally, this foreign policy, like all foreign policies, big or small, had to be backed up by a show of arms. Such an incident happened just when Francis was recovering from a serious illness. I could find out, I suppose, what the fighting was all about, but it does not seem important enough to take the trouble. During the Middle Ages such encounters between little cities and even villages were the equivalent of modern baseball games. As a rule they were just as harmless, too, in their final results—a few sprained ankles and dislocated shoulder-blades and, in extreme cases, a sock on the jaw from one of the players who so far forgot himself as to resort to personal violence. Should he have come home with a broken nose, Francis would not have minded, but his recent sickness had so exhausted him that he was obliged to return to his father's home before he had been more than a few days on the war-path. Being the town's Beau Brummel was very nice, but perhaps, so he began to suspect, it was not the rôle God wanted him to play.

Suddenly the 'war' was over. The young volunteers hastened back to Assisi. There was a grand celebration. Francis was urged to come. In this way his more vigorous friends hoped to make him forget his recent disappointment. He was crowned their king, and they set forth to awaken the town with a torchlight parade. But Francis slipped quietly away and when, at last, he was found, he was like a man in a trance. When he came back from this visit to distant and unknown regions, the old Francis Bernardone no longer existed. Brother Francis had taken his place and, as the poorest of the poor, he was to go through life until, some twenty-four years later, he was to descend into his pauper's grave, his body worn out long before its appointed time by a life of labour and want, his soul living on in all of us who put our faith in the laughing wisdom of the 'divine fool' rather than in the teachings of the duly belettered doctor of theology.

It is not easy, after so many centuries, to get a very clear idea of what Francis Bernardone was trying to accomplish, what he actually believed, and the sort of impression he made upon his contemporaries. We have not had anyone quite like him for a long time, and it would take almost superhuman courage to play the rôle of a Francis in our era of practical achievements. Thoreau comes perhaps nearest to him among the Americans. Tolstoy during his last years imitated, or tried to imitate, the private-poverty paragraph of the Franciscan programme. But Thoreau was lacking in one of the most essential qualities of Francis' character. He was, and remained, an honest Yankee with a desire to function. He

matter or by insisting that cholera microbes can be destroyed and broken legs can be healed by some kind of spiritual legerdemain. But in order to understand the difference between these very doubtful prophets and the little brother of every living being, we need only ask ourselves what the reaction of Francis would have been had such creatures come to him asking to be admitted to his fellowship. He would at once have sensed that no common bond could ever bind them together and would have asked them to be gone. For Francis, in spite of his meekness, was an expert psychologist. An unconscious one, of course, but how he did understand his fellow-men and how he knew how to penetrate into the most hidden chambers of their souls and how he was able there to kindle a little light that would never be extinguished as long as they lived!

How do I know? Because for many years my life was thrown with just such a person, and whatever there is good in me—intrinsically good, not just good on the surface (for I am a fairly bright person and can play many rôles)—but whatever there is in my heart that I can some day present to God Almighty as an excuse for all the years I have spent on His earth—all that I got from this one man. And so deeply did he impress his wishes upon me that I shall never break faith with him by revealing his name. Among other gifts, he presented me with the key to the only saint who survived the Reformation when all his colleagues, with the exception, of course, of the good St Nicholas fared very badly indeed at the hands of the Protestants. But then St Nicholas exists primarily in the memory of children, and children have never been very much interested in revolutions, except as an excuse for inventing a few new games.

To-day, though I may be mistaken in this opinion, Francis seems to be even more popular among the Protestants than among the Catholics. At least, I feel that we Protestants understand him a little better. We accept him as a typical representative of the medieval mentality and therefore can overlook what would otherwise disgust us—his unreasoning acceptance of disease and filth and all other kinds of afflictions which can so easily be avoided and even eradicated by the application of just a little soap and common sense. And we do not have to worry our heads about the question whether he actually suffered the stigmata in his hands and his feet after his visit to Mount Alverno or whether these were the hallucinations of a man exhausted by years of fasting and of nights spent in sleepless prayer. We relegate this problem to the department of psychopathology and then forget about it, having gradually learned that it is just as futile and foolish to discuss questions of pure faith as to engage our grandchildren in a debate about the truth or lack of truth of their best-beloved fairy story.

Finally, we do not need any manifestations of supernatural grace in the

furniture and unromantic portraits of unromantic ancestors. And ever again I compared it with the stable of the Babe of Bethlehem, about whom my grandmother had told me and about whom one of my uncles had given me a book, full of pictures. And always I silently regretted that I too had not been born in a stable, getting the smell of the earth in my nostrils instead of the odour of the wet tea-leaves with which, in those antediluvian times, the floors of all Dutch rooms were swept at least twice each week.

But what of the pathetic little house in the sleepy little Danish town of Odense, on the island of Fyn, where Hans Christian uttered his first uncertain cries? One room to hold a father—a cobbler—and a mother and a whole brood of children. Such hopeless poverty that, instead of a sheet, a left-over scrap from a piece of cloth used shortly before to cover a nobleman's coffin had to serve as a bed cloth.

The great event (great to us) happened on April 2, 1805. Eleven years later, the shoemaker's weak lungs gave up their hopeless struggle. The mother remained alone. Her burdens were heavy, and she sought and found consolation, and finally oblivion, in those bottles of schnapps upon which she spent the money kind-hearted neighbours contributed occasionally towards the support of her family.

But the divine spark, dormant in the soul of that little boy, could not be denied, for those whom the good Lord has touched will fulfil their destiny in spite of all handicaps and indignities. In the midst of his desperate poverty, he was for ever constructing little puppet theatres wherein he would re-enact the plays of Shakespeare and of his fellow-Dane, the famous Ludvig Holberg, not inaptly known as the Scandinavian Molière.

At a very early age came the necessity of making a living. It was intended to apprentice Hans Christian to a tailor, for the world would always need tailors, and it was as good or as bad a way of making a living as any other. But the boy refused. He was going to be an opera singer—nothing less than that!—an opera singer. Odense laughed. The Danes are rather given to laughing, not only at their own neighbours but at the world in general. They are a small nation, and it may be their way of protecting themselves against their enemies, and every country in Europe which goes its own quiet way and tends peacefully to its own affairs is apt to have a great many enemies.

When the child actually walked to the national capital to present himself and his ambitions at the stage door of the Royal Theatre, he became more than a joke. He was considered a lunatic. A harmless kind of fool but one who should not be left at large. He withdrew to a garret. He starved but he continued to sing until his voice changed. Then even he had to realize that a career on the boards was out of the question.

people continued to be hilariously funny about their 'famous' poet. Small nations are never very kind to their great men, and Ho Say Andersen got his share of coffee-house derision. Fortunately, there was a streak of naïve self-contentment in Andersen which saved him from realizing his actual position. He took this public derision for granted, as he took his own genius for granted and all the honours that now began to come to him. For example, he was pleased and deeply gratified but not particularly surprised that at the end of his visit to England in the year 1847 no one less than Charles Dickens—in person—bade him Godspeed. He went to partake of the afternoon *Kaffeeklatschen* of an endless number of small German princelings and listened to the praise of their dowdy wives and accepted their orders and medals, but he was not at all astonished that this should have happened to him. All his life long he had believed in Santa Claus. What of it if the good saint should have been a little late in arriving?

And so Andersen spent the rest of his days contentedly smoking his long porcelain pipe, frightened by every new invention that upset the peaceful world he had known and loved as a child, turning out novels he himself considered highly superior to his fairy-story stuff, and being cordially welcomed in all the most delightful homes of that most charming and civilized of cities. For all I know, he might have continued doing it until he was a hundred years old, but, unfortunately, at the age of only sixty-seven, he fell out of bed, hurt himself quite badly, and died three years later without ever having regained his health.

There are two kinds of so-called 'simple people' in the world. There are those who are simple because they are utterly devoid of inner complications. They were born simple and stay that way until the end of their lives, performing, if they are also honest, sober, and willing to work, simple tasks in simple ways and gaining the respect and not infrequently the affection of their fellow-men because they are excellent servants or fishermen or part of the animated furniture of a counting-house. But there are also those who seem simple because they are so hopelessly complicated that that is the only way the rest of us can ever hope to explain them. They are the men and women who are most apt to move the world out of its humdrum and commonplace existence and to do so with infinitely more far-reaching results than the great conquerors who destroy and found empires.

Both St Francis and St Hans Christian belonged to the latter category. They were entirely different in their approach towards life, but, fortunately, the good Lord needs all sorts of people his miracles to perform. And in this case he used these two extremes for a similar purpose. The

rococo make-believe there was very little that made sense and *Erzbischöfliche Hofkapellmeisters* had to live.

When this particular one, to his delighted surprise, discovered that his beloved wife (Maria Anna Pertl, from the near-by lake district) had presented him with a son who could play the harpsichord long before he was able to talk and who composed agreeable little minuets while still in his diapers (in those days, little boys used to wear them until they were three; girls were easier), he decided that luck had at long last knocked at the door of the Mozart family and that it was up to him to make the best of his marvellous opportunity. So, when little Wolfgang had reached the age of six and his sister was eleven years old, Papa took them both on tour. Billed as Nannerl and Wolferl, Maria Anna and Wolfgang Amadeus were dragged from one small German court to the next and then again to the next and then again, sleepy and tired, to still another town, though occasionally they fell ill and were allowed to recuperate for a few weeks in hired lodgings. Old Leopold Mozart had been for too long a time familiar with poverty not to welcome this unexpected chance to acquire a few thousand extra ducats, but at heart he was a kind and good man who dearly loved his children and who, even if he had been lacking in paternal affection, was much too shrewd to want to kill his little geese who laid such nice golden eggs.

Nannerl, a charming young Austrian girl, was rather pert and quite pretty, but Wolferl was the real attraction of Leopold's troupe of performing harpsichordists. He remained completely unspoiled in an age when most people could only stammer and sputter whenever they found themselves face to face with some *Durchlauchtigste Gnaden*, though he **might** be the world's most insufferable bore and boor. Years after his visit to some court or courtlet, from the mighty Hofburg in Vienna down to the half-ruined Schloss Pfurzheim in Buchswinkel an der Lahn, stories were still being told about this adorable child who had made himself comfortable on the broad lap of that fortress of maternal rectitude, Maria Theresa, and had boldly told the old dragon, "I like you. You are nice."

This particular episode was invariably followed by an account of how the little boy had slipped on the inlaid floor of Schönbrunn and how he was just on the point of starting to cry, when one of the imperial princesses, the same one who had been born on the disastrous day of Lisbon's terrible earthquake, had picked him up and had consoled him until little Wolferl, the innocent darling, had kissed her and had told her, "I love you and when I grow up I shall marry you." Quite a number of people lived long enough to be present on the day when this same princess was driven to the guillotine amidst the howls and cat-calls of her former subjects, and they may well have wondered whether the poor girl would not have been

As good old Papa Haydn once observed, young Wolfgang's string quartets alone would have brought him undying fame, and they formed but a very small part of his output. And let us remember that everything he touched became alive with a charm and grace that shouts "Mozart" at you after only three or four bars and continues to do so till the end.

It was a magnificent life—a most useful existence from the point of view of giving. From the point of view of receiving, it was one of the saddest tragedies of all times. This benefactor of mankind, whose music will carry you through the most horrible experiences of your own career, lived all his life on the verge of bankruptcy, exhausted his body by labours which would have killed six ordinary longshoremen, and finally succumbed to under-nourishment and worry and disappointment, disappearing in a pauper's grave at a moment when a regular salary of, let us say, two hundred pounds a year could have saved him for another quarter of a century of useful production.

And now arises the question: was this merely bad luck, or was it his own fault, some unfortunate kink somewhere in his character, or was it a little of both? Such things are terribly hard to decide with a definite yes or no.

Let us first consider the negative qualities which can be written down against him and which undoubtedly were written down against him by many of his contemporaries while he was alive. He had the misfortune of being obliged to live under the rule of two exceptionally dull and short-sighted members of the House of Habsburg. Maria Theresa was a narrow-minded prototype of Queen Victoria, if you are able to conceive of such a combination. Music to her existed merely as an adornment of crown and altar. Just as the whole world had been really created for the greater glory of the Habsburg dynasty, that each of its boys and girls (and, Lord! were their women prolific!) could be given a nice little garden of his own with a couple of faithful gardeners to keep their master nicely supplied with fresh flowers and vegetables.

As for Maria Theresa's son, Joseph II, he was intelligent but in the wrong way. He had a clear enough brain but no real wisdom—and no understanding at all of his fellow-men made of ordinary human clay. He meant to do well by them. He was sincerely interested in their prosperity and happiness. But there was no one at his court who could say, "Sorry, your Majesty, but you are starting this whole reform business from the wrong end. You want to turn everything upside down before you have made it clear to your subjects why the present arrangement is wrong. Those faithful subjects are not all of them as bright as you are. They only know how things were done while their fathers and their grandfathers were alive. They can't quite imagine that this world can be run in a

sentence above can tell you, that is the shortest road to the poorhouse. But, being almost as much of an optimist as the late Wilkins Micawber, young Mozart very easily regained his good spirits and assured himself that all would be well as soon as he should have obtained some definite position (anything at all—organist in a church, teacher of a choir, *Hofkomponist*, *Hofkapellmeister*—anything with a fixed income) and, in order to make a good impression upon his future patron, he would borrow another hundred thalers, pay back fifty to the friend from whom he had borrowed seventy-five, and invest the rest in a beautiful scarlet coat (bought, of course, on credit) which gave him quite an air of distinction and made him feel that he was once more sitting on top of the world.

In all this, Mozart was undoubtedly extremely foolish. That is not the way a reasonable person should act. But neither would a reasonable person compose *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, or *The Magic Flute*. It all depends upon which we think the more important item in the sum total of our civilization—the expert at material acquisition, who turns every venture into a fortunate gamble, or the teller of stories in words or melody, who never has any bank account at all—the man who leaves a fortune to his heirs, or the Christ whose sole possession at the time of his death consists of one shirt.

Of course, I am talking of extremes, and they are the exception. Between them lie the cases of hundreds of millions of average people who, somehow or other, will have to muddle through as best they can and who as a rule do so, even deriving considerable satisfaction from their terrestrial adventures. And then, from this distance at least, it seems incredible that amid all the wealth of Austria, and Vienna especially, it should have been impossible to find that eight hundred or one thousand thalers that would have prolonged Mozart's life (or Schubert's life, for that matter) by a good many useful years. Only one person ever made a serious effort to help him. Frederick William II of Prussia (nephew to Frederick the Great) asked him to come to Berlin and offered him the position of *Hofkapellmeister* at his court, with an annual income of three thousand thalers, as compared to the eight hundred gulden which was all the Emperor Joseph ever meant to give him. But when this opportunity offered itself Mozart refused. And why? Out of loyalty to his Emperor and to his beloved Viennese. And how did his Emperor and his beloved Viennese repay him for this generous gesture? By allowing the Italians, who had had a monopoly on their music and opera for the last two hundred years, to ruin his *Figaro* by systematically singing off key and by going through their parts in such a way that even so magnificent a work was bound to fail. Here, most likely, you will interrupt me and will ask me what of the story (of that endlessly repeated myth) about Vienna as



disapproval that all she could stammer was this: "Just another piece of German *cochonnerie*!"

And so it went on. There were a great many people who recognized Mozart's genius, but there were even more to whom his music was just a little too new and too unusual to be pleasant to the ear, though they vaguely realized that what they heard was the work of an exceptionally talented artist. Therefore, it would be unfair to claim that he was completely unrecognized during his lifetime. He was both recognized and appreciated, and many of his older and more experienced colleagues were on his side, loved him, did their best to help him, and told the world at large that it should take more interest in the greatest of them all.

But something went wrong just the same. What was it? Why did Mozart never find suitable employment? Why, with all his rich and powerful patrons, did he have to write pot-boilers until he died from sheer physical exhaustion?

You will notice that I am deliberately marking time and that I am desperately grabbing at all the little straws that come my way. Is that a confession that I do not know the answer? It is.

But my most accurate guess (as far as I can see) lies in a hint I have already made a couple of times before. In every career, no matter what brilliant talents, what industry, what artistic integrity, there also enters the element of luck. Several of Mozart's contemporaries in the musical field were proof of this statement. Haydn, for example, had the good fortune to meet a Jewish concert manager (the first of all international concert managers, and what a rôle they have played since then!) who literally bribed him away from his everlasting Esterházy family (again a case of misguided loyalty) and brought him to London, where old Papa Haydn enjoyed such enormous success that he started a new musical career at the age of sixty and produced the best work of his long and busy life.

But either Dame Fortune never called on poor Wolferl, or, when she did, he was perhaps busy teaching the pianoforte or deportment to his flighty and on the whole rather worthless wife, who meant well but who was the last person in the world to know how to manage the household of the kind of man she had married. Or he was absent on his endless trips to this, or that, or the other little Austrian city, where they had promised him an orchestra of not less than a dozen fiddlers and flute-players for his next opera. Or he was busy discussing a new libretto of something that was absolutely bound to 'pack them in' and that was to be written by his faithful librettist, the curious Venetian, Lorenzo da Ponte, who, after having provided Mozart with the texts for his *Don Giovanni*, *Figaro*, and *Così fan tutte*, fell upon such evil days that he had

The music of Mozart is like the water that pours forth from these pleasant fountains. It started somewhere among the lonely tops of the surrounding peaks. It flowed down amid the forests and pastures of the old familiar hillsides. Then it was taken in hand. It was tamed. It was given form and shape that it might become a blessing unto all mankind, a source of everlasting inspiration and joy for those who have not yet forgotten the laughter and the simple pleasures of their childhood days.

I have nothing to add to that. The little fountain goes on splashing, and when life becomes too much for us, as is apt to happen quite often these days, we can sit down on the stone wall and close our eyes and listen, and once more we begin to feel that life was meant to be good and beautiful.

The music for our evening's entertainment was easy, for Mozart, who never had had an adequate orchestra at his disposal during his own lifetime and who not infrequently was obliged to give his performances without having had time to conduct a single rehearsal (and that with musicians playing from hastily and badly copied sheets of manuscript), would, of course, be delighted to hear his works performed by some of our modern maestros, provided they did not indulge in the luxury of playing one of his minuets with an orchestra of one hundred and fifty musicians. I therefore sent a telegram to Frits in Amsterdam and asked him to bring me the following Mozart records: the symphonies in G minor and D and the "Jupiter" Symphony, the Quartet for Flute and Strings in D, the Variations on a Theme by Gluck, the *Requiem* in D minor, and as much as he could get from *The Marriage of Figaro*, *The Magic Flute*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*. That was much too much music for one short evening, but we had no way of knowing what he wanted to hear, and, anyway, nobody can ever have too many Mozart records.

But the dinner—that was no easy matter!

Of one thing I was certain. We must have Mozart's beloved ice-cream for dessert, and I wrote to The Hague for a pineapple so that we could have pineapple ice-cream or *glace à l'ananas*, as it was to be called on our written menu. (I always drew rather pretty menus so that our guests could take them along as souvenirs, and out of habit I stuck to the French names, which have so much more fascinating a sound than their English equivalents—who would eat Brussels sprouts when he could get *choux de Bruxelles*?)

But what of the rest? I felt that I need not worry about Hans Christian. Although he had always loved good food, he had gone hungry so many years of his life that he would eat anything that was set before him—the

"For goodness' sake," she asked, "you're not going to have that slut again—the one with the painted hair who carried on so disgustingly with my Hein?"

"Poor Hein!"

"Poor Hein indeed!" she answered. "It will be a long time before he hears the last of that little episode."

"But it wasn't his fault," I protested.

"I know," she laughed, "he hated the old scarecrow. But it's such fun to have something on him at last."

"At last?"

"Yes, at last, for Hein always was so careful!"

I whispered the Dutch equivalent of "Oh, yeah?"

"What is that?"

"Nothing," I told her. "I was just thinking of something."

And now for the most entertaining, amazing, brilliant, and happiest evening we had had so far. Both Frits and I were at home when Erasmus arrived. He had dropped into a regular routine. He used to come at half-past six and then have a glass of mild sherry and a bit of toasted herring, for his dislike of fish did not extend to our domestic herring. We occasionally joined him with his curious *hors d'œuvre*, but more out of politeness than from a real love for that humble member of the Clupea family which had laid the foundation for our nation's prosperity.

Our three guests arrived simultaneously, and that boded well for the success of the evening. No difficulty either this time in recognizing them. They looked exactly like their portraits and wore what we had expected them to wear. St Francis was garbed in his brown robe. Hans Christian Andersen appeared in his Inverness cape, and his shiny old hat was as badly brushed as it should have been. Wolfgang Amadeus had his hair neatly powdered and had taken out his best red coat for this festive occasion. He carried his little tri-cornered hat in his hand, and some very handsome white lace was visible round his neck.

We begged them to come in and not stand on any ceremony. "But of course, the good father goes first," Mozart said. "Our beloved Franciscus must go first, of course he must," Hans Christian repeated, and with these few words he betrayed his Danish origin, for all Danes speak as if they had just submitted to an operation for the removal of their adenoids. Erasmus uttered a few polite Latin phrases of welcome, and everything was very simple and very pleasant, and after five minutes we felt as if we had known each other all our lives.

The conversation that evening flowed like a mountain brook in spring. The Italian of St Francis was easier to understand than I had anticipated.

gate. He was the only one who then followed me to my grave. He's been with me ever since, but I did not quite know whether I dared bring him to-night."

"We love dogs in this house," Frits told him.

"How about swans?" Hans Christian asked.

"Swans, too, but, pardon my asking, is that your swan?"

"It is my Ugly Duckling—the Ugly Duckling that made me who I am or who I was. I don't quite know this evening. It is all so strange."



THE MOZART DOG WENT BACK TO SLEEP

"Is that really your Ugly Duckling?" Frits asked. "Then he is even more welcome, and we will leave the door to the garden open in case the room gets too warm for him."

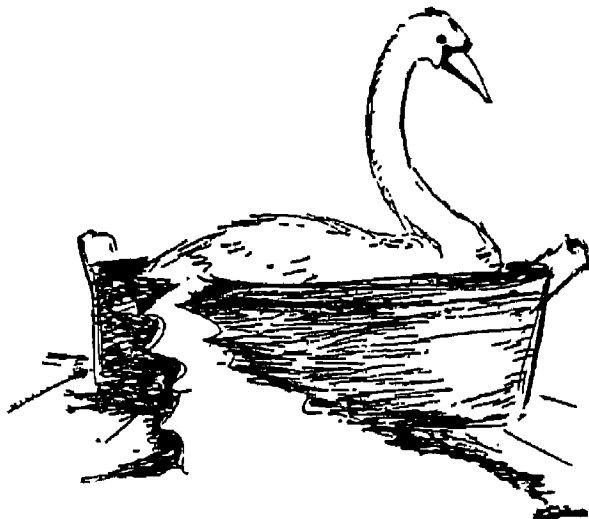
"He would like that."

"But what does he eat?"

"Oh, anything at all. A bit of stale bread."

"And how about the little pup?"

"Perhaps you have a bit of meat for him."



HANS ANDERSEN'S UGLY DUCKLING TAKES A SWIM

"And better than literature," Hans Christian added. But the good saint only made the sign of the Cross and recited a short invocation.

"Amen," Erasmus said at the end, and Frits and I, both noble heathens, added a little amen of our own. One somehow did when St Francis recited a prayer.

We took our seats, and the experiment with our artichoke soup seemed to be quite a success, when Frits, turning to me, asked, "Do you hear what I hear?"

I listened.

"What does it sound like to you?"

"Like the bird-house in the Amsterdam zoo."

"So it does to me. We must be crazy!"

At that moment Hein came running out of the kitchen. "For God's sake," he shouted. "Come quick—come quickly—and look out of the window!"

We dropped our napkins and rushed into the kitchen. The old pear-tree in the garden was full of birds, of all kinds of birds. There was even one which looked like a pelican.

"What next?" Jo asked, who thought a tame swan in her kitchen was enough for one evening.

But St Francis was running towards the door that led into the garden. "I think I know," he told us. "They will do that sometimes. They mean no harm. They merely want to hear me say a few words to them. Then they will go away again. But they like it when I speak to them, even if it is only a few words," and he stepped out on the grass and started:

"My little brothers and sisters, you know how much I love you. But to-night some kind people have invited me for dinner. You will see for yourselves that it would not be polite on my part if I were to upset all their plans by talking to you so long that the food their excellent cook has prepared for us would be spoiled. And so will you now please—all of you—go back to your nests? It is time for you to go to sleep anyway, and some of you must have travelled quite a long distance. Good-night, my little brothers and sisters, I love you very dearly, but that must be all for this evening."

Whereupon the garden was suddenly filled with a cloud of coloured feathers while these beautiful creatures rose into the air, with the exception of a very large one who looked as if he expected something.

"He is an old friend of mine," St Francis explained, "I usually give him something to eat. He should not be so greedy, but after all, he is only a bird and lives very far away."

"Would bread do?"

We stepped out of the door and there found Wolfgang Amadeus hugely enjoying himself, for one by one he was recognizing old friends who had belonged to the Viennese musical world when he himself had been part of it and whom he had often joined when they went forth to pay their musical compliments to some distinguished fellow-citizen to celebrate his marriage or his seventieth birthday. He was only waiting for the end of his *Nachtmusik* to rush forth and embrace them, but when the last note died down, behold! the market-place lay deserted. The musicians were gone, and what made this little intermezzo even more mysterious was the fact that no one else in the village seemed to have noticed or heard what had happened. Not a single window had been opened. Our village policeman, who ever after that unpleasant experience with the two holy men from Nicæa had made it a point to remain on duty Saturday evenings, was, as we could notice, smoking his pipe and reading his *Middelburgsche Courant* in his small room off the main entrance of the town hall. And so the whole thing might just as well have been a dream, except that all of us had seen and heard it with our own eyes and ears—had seen it as clearly as we had seen the birds that had come to call upon St Francis—just as we even then were hearing the soft snoring of Mozart's faithful dog sleeping in front of the fire.

Some day, I knew, I would probably want to tell all that happened to us in that wonderful autumn and winter to my grandchildren, and they would listen patiently, and they would say, "We love you, Grandpa, especially when you are telling us fairy stories." And I would insist that I was not telling them fairy stories but the truth, and they would answer me, "We don't believe a word of what you say, but what is the difference as long as we love it?" Wherein they would show greater wisdom than was ever the share of their grandfather, who never quite rid himself of the notion hammered into his head by his history teachers that he must try and find out the real truth. As if any of us could bear to live in a world of unadulterated truth! The New Englanders came nearest to doing this, and look at the results!

While Jo was removing the plates after our *carbonnades à la flamande*, she whispered into my ear, "I have a surprise for you. Something I read about in that new cookery book you gave me."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Wait and see. But please blow out all candles."

I blew them out and waited. Then came Jo's surprise! She had somehow discovered that when you poured brandy over ice-cream, it would burn for a short while without making the ice-cream melt. I hated to think of that excellent product of the *fine bois* going up in flames, for really

good cognac is getting extremely scarce now that the whole world has fallen for the fake of a 'true brandy of Napoleon.' But the effect upon our visitors was delightful, and even St Francis was as pleased as a child. We watched the pretty blue flames as they played round the high tower of the ice-cream, then slowly died down, flickered up once more, throwing strange shadows upon the ceiling, and finally went out altogether.



JO ENTERED, CARRYING HER FLAMING DISH

The sudden darkness caused two incidents. The Ugly Duckling woke up and, frightened by his uncustomary surroundings, emitted two loud honk-honks, and Jo stepped on the tail of Mozart's dog, who had followed her into the kitchen in search of something more to eat and who now yelped as if he were being murdered. However, the moment the candles had been relighted, the 'right atmosphere' returned. The pup and the Ugly Duckling went back to sleep, and we had our pineapple ice-cream.

I had read a great deal about Mozart's physical delicacy. I had never had any reason to doubt the truth of that statement, but when the rest of us noticed how immensely he enjoyed his *Gefrorenes* the family 'went slow' on the ice when it was passed to us a second time, and our saintly friend barely touched a spoonful—he had never eaten it before and complained to us, laughingly, that it made him feel frozen all over inside. But that evening we watched Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Hans Christian Andersen get away with three entire quarts of pineapple ice-cream. I had heard of such feats in newspaper stories about ice-cream-eating contests in the Middle West, but here I saw it happen before my own eyes.

"Oh, well," said Frits afterwards to Jo and Hein, who had been looking on, "perhaps they needed a few extra vitamins or something."

"I'm afraid that most of those people you ask never get enough to eat," the compassionate Jo answered. "They sure wolf their food when they come!"

"They live on holiness," Hein told her.

"Give me a good Dutch steak," was Jo's reply, "and I can do without the holiness."

Frits held up both hands. "Children," he remonstrated, "are those the sort of things that should be said in this house to-night? Think of our guest."

But Jo was unconvinced. "I know," she answered, "and he's a lovely man even if he is a papist, but there! I don't want to be narrow-minded—he's as nice a man as I have ever met. But, poor fellow, if he had only taken care of himself and had paid a little attention to the things he ate, think of what he might have done!"

"It seems to me," I interrupted, "that he did fairly well, even if he never had a square meal. What more do you think he should have done?"

"Never mind," said Jo. "I am no—what do you call it?—I am no philosopher. But I have my own opinions on such subjects." And no matter how hard I tried afterwards to make her commit herself on this subject, I never got any further answer out of her. Food was a serious matter to her. Indeed, to her the enjoyment of a good meal was the nearest thing to saintliness. Perhaps it even came first.

Is there any greater pleasure in this world than to sit round a table with people you really like, with whom you are tuned in on the same emotional and spiritual wave-length, so that there never is any static, and with whom you agree so fully upon all matters of real significance that you can disagree just as heartily upon the non-essentials? Most of us experience far too little of that sort of thing. We seem to feel that we should always be doing something. Just to sit and talk or, even worse, just to sit and do nothing at all, not even talk, is held to be a waste of time. How one can waste something that does not really exist, I never have been able to understand, but I do think that it would be of the greatest benefit to us as a nation if we could learn to spend at least half an hour after every meal sitting quietly round the dinner-table. If the maid has to go to the movies, let her go, and wash the dishes yourself. Play with a few nuts or pieces of candy, drink a few drops of cognac (for cognac is the soul of wine, and in a sober glass of wine there lies much wisdom), and contemplate the delightful disorder of the dinner-table, for



Also, quite naturally, I had drifted towards Mozart, who was specially pleased when I told him that when I was very young—six or seven—my fiddle teacher had for a short while taught me out of his father's *Violin Schule*. "Dear Papa," he said, "he was a good craftsman, none ever better than he, and I owe him much. Perhaps it would have been better for me if I had not been dragged around from court to court when I was quite so young. But I am sure dear Papa meant well, and Nannerl and I really rather enjoyed meeting all those fine ladies and gentlemen. Nannerl was a sweet girl.

"And isn't it wonderful that Nissen should have written my life! It isn't every man who would spend his days writing the life of his wife's first husband. Yes, it was a good world. I only wish it had lasted a bit longer. . . . And now I will tell you what you can do for me—I would love to hear my *Voi che sapete* once more, but in German this time. I want to find out whether it really sounds as terrible as the critics used to say."

Eleven o'clock. Half-past eleven. A quarter to twelve. We had had almost an hour of music (most of it arias from his operas) when Mozart said, "That seems about enough. I don't want to be selfish. I want to give my other friends a chance. Now let us sit down and hear what our Danish friend has to say. He was a story-teller, wasn't he?"

Hans Christian bowed. "I never thought very much of ~~those little~~ fairy-tales of mine," he remarked, "but they were such small trouble, and they gave other people so much happiness, I rather felt it my duty to go on writing them."

"Isn't there one you remember which you never told when you were alive?" Mozart asked with more shrewdness than I had expected from him.

"There is," Andersen answered. "Would you like to hear it?"

There was a chorus of assent from all of us, and even St Francis, after Erasmus had translated the question, expressed his pleasure with a staccato of *benissimo's*.

Frits, who always thought of everything, had remembered that Hans Christian used to smoke a pipe with a large china bowl. He had dug one up in an Amsterdam tobacco-shop, and all the evening long our beloved Dane had been contentedly puffing at his new acquisition, remarking from time to time upon those handy little "tinder-sticks" which would ignite themselves when struck against the side of their box.

"In my days," he told us, "we had the devil of a time to keep our pipes going. We needed a hot brick, and all day long we were rolling up bits of paper to keep our tobacco burning. Yes, I like this invention, and if you don't mind, I will take some of them with me as a souvenir. And now may I bother you for a little more of that excellent tobacco in the old

"The good Lord had not the slightest idea what His faithful old gate-keeper was driving at, but as He always had felt a very warm liking for this plain-spoken old fisherman, He told him, 'Go ahead, beloved friend, go ahead and ask Me anything you want.' Once more St Peter ran his hand down his beard, and then he asked his question.

"'Dear Lord,' he said, 'we have known each other for a great many years now, and when one loves a person as I love You, one comes to know a great many things about him he never thinks you have even guessed at, for everybody is always sure that he can hide his thoughts by frowning or looking solemn or smiling or something.'

"'I know,' the Lord replied, 'that was one of my cleverest ideas, and I am very proud of it—that ability I bestowed upon people to hide their thoughts.'

"'And You think, Lord, that You yourself are any good at it?' asked Peter, who had not been born to be a yes-man.

"'Yes, I rather do!'

"'Well, then, I am afraid, Lord, that You have another guess coming, which, of course, is not the way I should talk to You, but that is what I feel.'

"'Forget it,' said the Lord. 'We are old friends. We can speak our minds. Forget it and ask your question. ~~What is it?~~'

"'Well, then, good Lord, since You insist. ~~I know what great hopes~~ You had set on that famous experiment of Yours on that little planet, and how You were full of hope for the future, for now at last You had created a being after Your own image and had given him a fine place of residence and an abundance of free will. That was a combination that must succeed—that could not possibly go wrong.'

"This time it was the turn of the Lord to stroke His beard. 'I remember,' He answered.

"'Well, then, what I have always wanted to ask You but never had a chance to do so until now, when You want to go back there . . .'

"'Yes, yes,' the Lord interrupted him, 'what is it?'

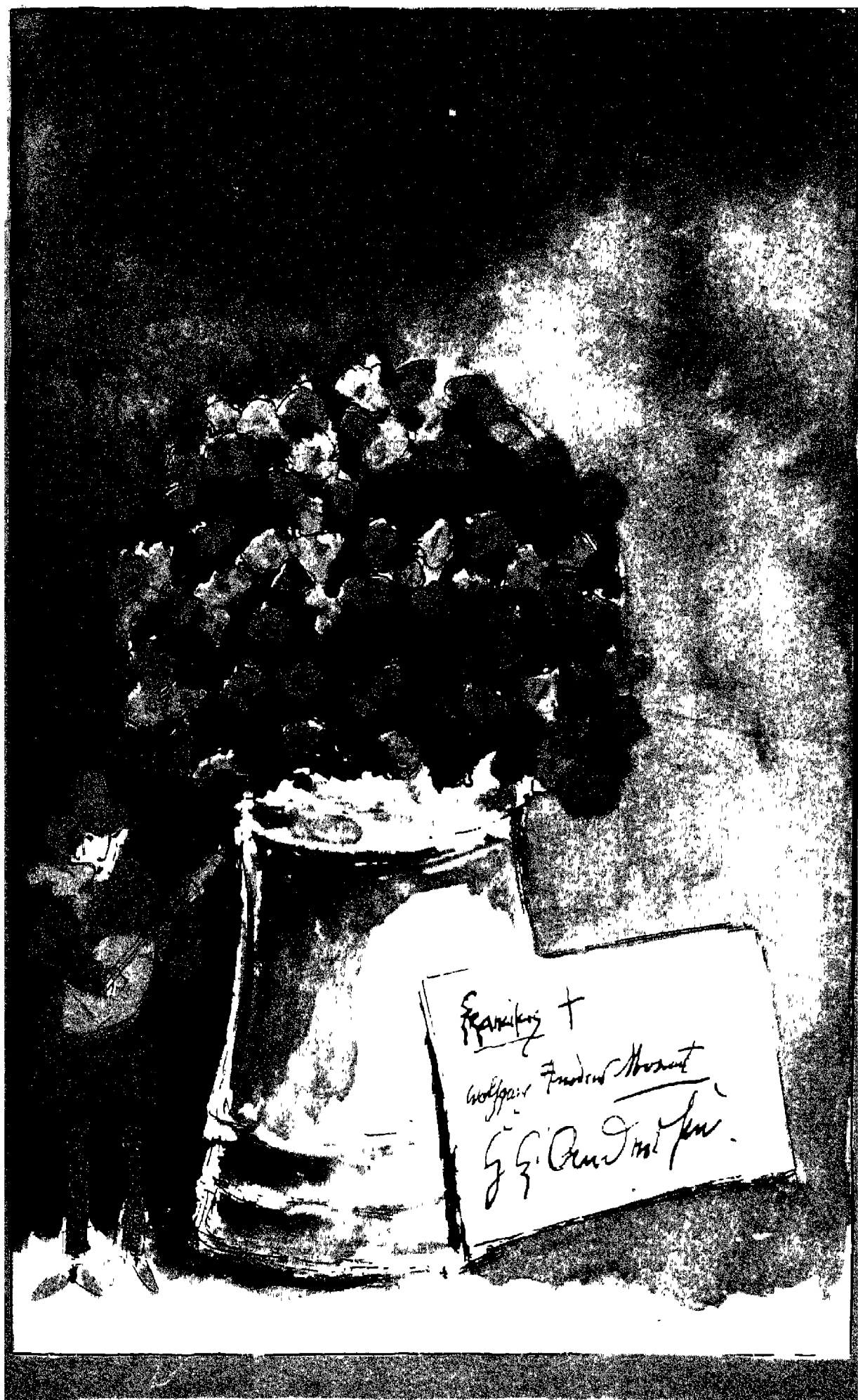
"'What I wanted to ask You is this. If You had to do it all over again—this experiment with this strange biped created after Your own image and endowed with a will of his own which he could use for either good or evil—would You do it again?'"

Hans Christian paused. I used the opportunity to look at my wrist-watch—one more minute.

"Go on," I begged him. "Tell us the rest."

"Yes, but my pipe has gone out, and I have lost my little tinder-sticks."

I lit a match and held it over his pipe in such a hurry that I almost burned his long nose. Hans Christian was a very deliberate fellow



OUR GUESTS HAD LEFT US A LITTLE SOUVENIR

## CHAPTER XII

### We Entertain BEETHOVEN, NAPOLEON, and My Own GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER and Listen to a Long Monologue

SHALL I tell you something funny?" Erasmus asked me the next time I visited him in his sunlit room among his ancient folios. "Something quite amusing, but at the same time a little pathetic."

"What is it?"

"I heard that some one is very jealous of us."

"Of whom?"

"Of *us*! Of those of us who have been invited to your dinners."

"But how does anyone know? We have been very discreet. We have done our best to keep our secret well guarded."

"That I realize. But where I am now it is not really so very different in some respects from life on earth. Curiosity is one human trait that seems to survive even in death. Curiosity and jealousy."

"And now the Elysian Fields are filled with stories about our parties, and others feel hurt because they have not been invited?"

"Everybody seems to know all about your dinners up to the last details: how Mozart and Hans Christian ate all the ice-cream and how scandalously those two bishops behaved and what a marvel your cook is at roasting chickens. But now something funny has happened."

"Tell me, please. I'm getting curious."

"Well, this is the way I heard it. Most of us, when we bid farewell to this earth, are quite satisfied that our time has come. What with all the troubles and tribulations we have seen, the unnecessary cruelty, the endless stupidities and disappointments, we are more than ready to go. Many of us are more than satisfied when God's dark angel touches us and tells us to be prepared to follow him. But now and then somebody is born who can never have enough, who is insatiable, who has reached out for everything, who has had everything, yet wants more."

"A horrible thought!"

"The most horrible thought in the world."

"And outside of it, too!"

"I stand corrected—and outside of it, too."

"And who is the unfortunate soul who feels jealous of all our other guests?"

"You could probably guess his name."

old lion, three names appeared on my slip of paper. They were that of the Emperor Napoleon, that of my own great-great-grandfather, a simple corporal of the Grenadier Guards and volunteer for the ill-fated expedition against Russia of 1812, and, as an afterthought, that of the man who had also for a great many years fallen under the Corsican's spell but who had recovered and had for ever cast him out of his life—Ludwig van Beethoven.



LATE AT NIGHT I USED TO BRING THE INVITATIONS TO THE TOWN HALL

Frits was delighted when I told him. "I hate that dreadful little Italian," he said. "I loathe the very name of him. But I should like to meet him. And it would be marvellous to make old Ludwig go after him! I hope he is in one of his ferocious moods. That would be magnificent!"

The problem of food! The Emperor detested long meals. Fifteen minutes was all he ever cared to spend at the table. I decided to make him stay for at least two hours. He was a monotonous feeder—a cold leg of chicken for breakfast, the same for luncheon (on those rare occasions when he bothered to eat that meal), and roast chicken for dinner. Anything outside of that was apt to be sent back to the kitchen. Very well, there would be no chicken that evening. We would give him fish, which he detested. He drank nothing but a very light claret. There would be only champagne at our meal. Never mind the expense! There would be enough champagne to float Hein's boat, and we would both of us fill the room with smoke, for he detested tobacco. As for the box of snuff which we had bought a few months before, when we entertained Emerson,

honoured ancestor will be much too excited at meeting his Emperor either to know or care what he gets. With the coffee, let's have cooking brandy, or shall we waste a little money on a cordial he will detest when he sees the name: Danziger Goldwasser?

And now a short report upon his Majesty, for he insisted upon briefness in all communications sent to him. This was only natural, as reports came to him all day long—reports from Madrid and Rome and Amsterdam and Hamburg and Warsaw and Berlin and from every corner of the world, including the new one, until he sold his American holdings for several million dollars. But few communications ever reached him from London until the year 1815, when a brief note addressed to the commander of the *Bellerophon* gave orders to remove General Bonaparte to H.M.S. *Northumberland* and take him for safe-keeping to the island of St Helena. Napoleon must have known about that island. In one of his schoolbooks that have been preserved (I think it is in Genoa) he had noted down: "St Helena, a little and very lonely island in the southern half of the Atlantic Ocean." He had six endless years in which to find out how true that was—six years of being buried alive after twenty-six years into which he had packed more activity and more glory than have ever come to any other man. I don't like him, but I confess that it was a pretty stiff sentence. On the other hand, suppose I had been the British Government, what else should I have done? What else could any Government have done that wanted to rid the world of a human being who was a volcano, who had more energy than a hundred million ordinary human beings, who had fewer scruples than the lowest type of highwayman, who had more power over his fellow-men than anybody else of whom the record has survived, who could do more work in a shorter space of time than two dozen ordinary statesmen, and whose ego was so great that he needed an entire planet as a background for his ambitions and his vanity?

But I must make this brief and, above all things, precise, for that is the way to do things in the truly Napoleonic style. Very well, here I go!

Napoleone Buonaparte was born in 1769, a year after his native island of Corsica had been incorporated into the kingdom of France. An important item, this, for it was to influence all the days of his youth and, until he was in his early twenties, he was not really a Frenchman but a violent Corsican patriot and a rebel with a dream of a liberated and independent Corsican nation and with—who could tell?—a king of its own—his Majesty Napoleone I.

These patriotic sentiments he had inherited from his parents—most of all from his mother. For the father, Carlo Buonaparte, was just another rather shiftless scion of an old Italian family which could pride itself upon

1779 the governor felt the need of sending a trusted emissary to Versailles to consult the home Government. Carlo Buonaparte was chosen for this mission. He asked leave to take his second son, Napoleone, then ten years old and (as boys of his age are apt to be) a dangerous rebel, every inch a Corsican patriot.

That was the beginning of Napoleone's career as a Frenchman.

He was not a particularly attractive child. He was as pale as a sheet, as thin as a rail, and terribly awkward. He wore ill-fitting clothes and in everything he said or did proclaimed himself a provincial. But he had a pair of eyes no one ever forgot. Also, he had terrible attacks of temper which occasionally led to such outbursts of fury that people suspected epileptic fits. But that was not true. Bismarck, too, was apt to break forth into uncontrollable paroxysms of weeping whenever he was crossed, but no one ever accused him of being an epileptic, like Cæsar, St Paul, and Mohammed.

For the rest, nothing very remarkable either as a student or, afterwards, as a young officer. Except the dreadfully serious way in which he took everything connected with his own person and his family. Papa Carlo died when Napoleone was sixteen, and he then became the head of the family. His elder brother, Joseph, did not amount to much. It was up to little Napoleone to look after his mother and to provide for his sisters.

In this respect he showed himself a perfect Italian. He took care of all his relations and heaped favours upon them as long as he had any favours to bestow. They repaid him in the usual way. They were never satisfied. They were always clamouring for just a little more. When his luck turned, they suddenly were very busy with their own concerns. Except old Letizia. She remained faithful, even after it had been proved that she had been right and that it could not really last.

After having learned the elements of his future trade at the military school of Brienne, Napoleone Buonaparte did a year of post-graduate work at the École Militaire in Paris. He therefore was given the best training the old French kingdom could bestow upon its future officers. In 1785 he became an under-lieutenant, if that is the way to translate the French title of *sous-lieutenant*.

Then came the Revolution, and Napoleon found his second father. For it was the French Revolution that sired the Emperor of the French.

*Allons, enfants de la patrie!* The people of France were on their way. So was Lieutenant Bonaparte, for together with his Corsican ambitions he was thinking of shedding the Italian spelling of his name. In short, Lieutenant Napoleon Bonaparte was ready to begin his career. And the

to dispose of their plunder. When the plot is at last discovered, it is definitely established that the Queen is in no way involved, has not even the slightest idea what it is all about. But the talk of the town makes her little candle, away up there in the big hall of Versailles, flicker and sputter so violently that it is almost extinguished. The crown of France can no longer stand that sort of thing. The country is bankrupt. The country has been bankrupt for quite a long time now. The people are starving. The army has become restless. One financial wizard after the other is pushed forward to try his luck and pull billions out of an empty treasure chest. When he is not successful right away the Queen curls her pretty lips in a disdainful way. As an Austrian Habsburg, she is above worrying about such foolish details as money and credit. The money should be there no matter what happens, and the credit should be unlimited. Get rid of the latest miracle man, who apparently does not know how to handle the philosopher's stone, and get a new one. Or don't get anybody at all, and just let events take their course.

But it is only the year 1785, and the French are still profoundly loyal to their anointed sovereigns. Four entire years will have to elapse before the representatives of the people will be called together to advise (in the humblest of spirits) their royal master how he may save the country from a financial and political catastrophe. During those four years, Lieutenant Bonaparte wanders from garrison to garrison, spends his vacations in the old home town to help straighten out the family affairs, is once more tempted to dabble in local Corsican politics, but in the end thinks the better of it and returns to his post in Auxonne or Valence or wherever his regiment happens to be stationed. He also has certain literary plans, and at one time, when his funds are very low, he peddles books on the instalment plan. Then back once more to Corsica, where Pasquale Paoli, the liberator, has reappeared, this time backed up by English warships and English money.

The moment has come at last to make a definite choice. On the one hand, France, full of new ideas, is rushing forward to the new order of things as it stands explained in the books of the great contemporary philosophers. On the other hand, a quasi-independence under the suzerainty of England, which represents reaction, which believes in government by the few, and which denounces the new creed of liberty, equality, and fraternity as an invention of the devil.

Lieutenant Bonaparte still loves his native island, but he also has become a fairly good Frenchman. If that is the policy Paoli wants to follow, he is sorry, but it can never be his way. Then there is no other choice but to leave Corsica for ever—he and his family—his mother, his brothers and sisters, and Uncle Fesch.



transports are executed. Napoleon is not shot. He becomes a brigadier-general, when another incident occurs which might easily have cost him his life. In Paris, the Reign of Terror has now come to an end. Robespierre has been decapitated. Then the people begin to ask questions. Did not Robespierre have a favourite in the army, a young artilleryman who is said to have taken Toulon? Letters from Napoleon to both the Robespierres are found among their correspondence and the new brigadier-general is imprisoned and told to await trial. Before it comes off, the need for competent officers has made itself so sorely felt that Carnot, creating his armies out of fresh air and enthusiasm, insists upon his being released, but others declare that that is letting him escape a little too easily for a former friend of the tyrant, and Napoleon is dismissed.

Then follows a year of misery and poverty. Napoleon is forced to pawn his watch and sell his books. The Café de la Régence no longer sees him for his daily game of chess. He no longer has the price of a cup of coffee. He is thinking seriously of taking service with some foreign Power. The Sultan of Turkey is said to be reorganizing his armies. Why not go to Turkey and see what can be done there, for anything is better than Paris when you have not a sou in your pockets and must support a family of hungry brothers and sisters.

Politics? They would be all right if one knew beforehand who was going to come out on top. Otherwise, they are too dangerous. So there is nothing to do but wait. For it stands written in the stars that this particular young man will succeed beyond his boldest expectations, and the stars are never wrong. In proof whereof here comes a messenger bearing a note from one of the leading men in the Convention, Citizen Barras.

Citizen Barras is really Comte Paul François Nicolas de Barras. Seeing the way the wind is blowing, he has joined the Revolution almost from the beginning and by systematically betraying everybody he has managed to keep his own head on his shoulders. Nobody likes him, and nobody trusts him, but at least he has inherited the habit of giving orders. He now proposes that Bonaparte be entrusted with the command of the troops loyal to the Convention. Nothing can suit General Bonaparte better than that. He hastily accepts, for he is a man of law and order and hates to see Paris being run by the rabble, whether it be the rabble of the right or of the left.

On October 5, 1795—the 13 Vendémiaire, according to the new style—the mob is going to find out who is to be the real master and who will run the capital and the nation. The Convention has forbidden all public demonstrations. Early in the morning, crowds are beginning to move down on the Convention. They suddenly find themselves faced by several batteries placed in front of the church of Saint-Roch. The yellow-faced

have proved to be quite handy in some of the battles in Belgium. But deprive them of all power to think or act independently, for that may lead up to another revolution, and what the world wants and needs just now beyond all other things is peace and quiet and a chance to make some money out of legitimate business ventures. Therefore, all the philosophers who may be really 'effective' should be organized into an Academy of Science, which should be subject to official supervision like any army battalion, ready to function at a moment's notice or to be kept quietly in their barracks when not needed. As for the others, tell your police to keep them under observation and forget about them.

Again I am wandering, but this man is not a man. He is as complicated as a mountain range. Before one reaches the highest point there are endless valleys to be traversed and at least four dozen minor peaks to be conquered.

Let us see—where was I? It is the year 1799, and General Bonaparte has knocked the rest of Europe into a cocked hat. Since he has proved himself the ablest man in France (not to say the whole world), why shouldn't he be given the chance to rule the whole of France and as much of the rest of the Continent as can be forced to submit to his will? Have not all the great philosophers, from Confucius and Plato down to Rousseau, proclaimed that the best form of government is that in which the ablest man is put in charge of affairs? "Every philosopher a king and every king a philosopher." Who said that? Never mind. It may look all right on paper, but it should not be taken too seriously in practical life, and in the meantime, my friends, let us be practical and, above all things, let us 'function,' for 'functioning effectively' is the most important thing in life.

It is too bad that one cannot work twenty-four hours a day. It is worse that there are interruptions from another side. Passion is apt to make awful fools of ordinary people, and when it has them in its power there is little to choose between the commonest of his soldiers and their glorious commander-in-chief. If only he had never met this Creole woman with her Caribbean knowledge of how to bewitch men! It was the fatal Barras who had brought them together. She was a widow at that moment, having lost her noble husband, the Vicomte de Beauharnais, on the scaffold. Not because he had been lacking in 'civic qualities,' but because he had allowed the Austrians to beat him—and during that great emergency an unsuccessful revolutionary general lost both his command and his head.

And now Napoleon must have that woman with him always, for she has got into his blood, and he is an Italian and wants what he wants

her, insists (and on the very morning after their wedding) on rushing off to his smelly soldiers that he may conquer new worlds which he will place at her adorable little feet, then, after all, that is his lookout. Besides, he is such a clod—so inexperienced in the ways of the world (Josephine's world, Barras's world)—that he will never hear a word about his wife's goings-on.

That is what she thinks, but she is very much mistaken. Her husband knows everything that happens. He writes her furious letters. Then he tears them up and crawls before her like a lovesick boy, asking her, beseeching her, for at least a few drops of her favour. He is lost. He no longer can help himself.

And now Josephine hears that Napoleon plans to start forth upon even more idiotic adventures which may take him away from France—from Europe even—for God knows how long. For if this woman has got into his blood England has got on his nerves. No use trying to attack the island kingdom by way of the sea. It can't be done. Just once he will be given a chance to do it, when an American, by the name of Robert Fulton, will request him to come to the Seine and watch the steam-propelled boat he has been working on until it has become completely independent of the winds and the currents and, if properly armed, can sink the whole of the British navy.

But when opportunity offers itself, his mind, too definitely set in its own unmechanical ways, will fail to grasp the military possibilities of this smoke-belching scow. He will curtly dismiss the Yankee's invention and will go back to his plans to attack England in a way all his own.

The General loves maps, and on his maps he has been tracing the route he proposes to take when the final assault comes. First from southern France to Egypt. From Egypt by way of Asia to the Indus River, and then a sudden plunge into the heart of India itself. In that way the British Government will be deprived of its wealth, it will no longer be able to support every European Power bold enough to defy the armies of the Revolution, and soon the opposition on the Continent will collapse automatically, and England will be on her knees, suing for peace and begging for mercy.

A fine plan on paper and perfectly feasible—on paper.

In May of the year 1798 the General, accompanied by thirty-five thousand men, disappears from Toulon in a cloud of spray. A few weeks later news reaches Paris that he has taken Malta. On July 1 he disembarks at Alexandria, and three weeks later has destroyed the army of the sultan in a battle fought at the foot of the Pyramids. The road to the East lies open.

From now on, fantastic stories come back about still further victories,

First of all, a king gets too much power, abuses it, and is pushed off his throne by the common people, who thereupon get too much power and abuse it until all the other classes of society combine against them from fear of what may happen to their own heads. Then the whole performance is once more repeated, and we find the nation dominated by a strong man on horseback who gets too much power, abuses it, and is removed from office by the discontented masses who get too much power, who abuse their power until they in turn—and so on and so forth, world without end, amen.

Here I drop the present tense. In the first place, it is too easy, and in the second place, you may think that I have been reading too much Carlyle since I came to Veere. Besides, by now you probably have begun to understand what sort of young man this is I am holding up for your inspection.

The first thing the French needed after Napoleon had become First Consul was peace abroad and order at home. Their new ruler gave them both and even concluded a peace treaty with England. Then he paid his respects to God by concluding a peace treaty with the Pope, a compromise which returned to the Catholic Church most of its former rights and privileges. Next, a new universal code of law for the whole of France and Louisiana, where it prevails until this day.

In August 1802 Napoleon became Consul for life. Two years later, he dropped all pretence and crowned himself Emperor of the French, with Pope Pius VII standing by and unable to play the rôle his predecessor had enacted at the coronation of Charlemagne in the year 800. For on that occasion it was the Pope who had crowned the Emperor. This time the Emperor took the crown into his own hands and placed it firmly upon his own brow. After that public insult, the Pope was allowed to return to Rome and there await further instructions.

The rest of the story is known to every schoolboy. This salesman of the enlightened ideas and ideals of revolutionary France, everywhere welcomed as such, suddenly went in for an entirely different line of goods and thereafter only sold himself. For by now he had got delusions of grandeur. He divorced the woman for whom he had made a fool of himself, because she had failed to give him an heir to the throne, and married an Austrian princess who was to bestow upon his dynasty a slight touch of respectability and legitimacy.

That was the beginning of the end, for gradually the Emperor lost all touch with reality and came to believe in the rôle he was playing, as if it were something ordained by God instead of being the result of a happy combination of genius and luck. I am not belittling his talents. No

was responsible for the famous statement that if the nose of Cleopatra had been a tenth of an inch longer or shorter, the whole history of the human race would have been different. There was much truth in this statement as far as it went. But that learned Frenchman might have gone a little further. He might have added—as I do it for him here and now—that if, for example, John Calvin or Adolf Hitler had not been such constipated . . . but finish that sentence for yourself. And don't think that I am merely trying to be funny, for I was never so serious in all my life.

And now let me tell you something about another victim of his own genius and his own irregular habits—but what a difference in the results achieved by the two men! For Beethoven wasted and exhausted himself trying to bestow upon the world such beauty as it had never heard before. And while Napoleon's entire career had been dominated by the first person singular, Beethoven's whole existence was centred around the second person plural. It was 'I' against 'you,' and in the end, the 'you' won.

To-day, Beethoven has become one of our secular saints, whereas the name Napoleon survives in a rather rich and unwholesome sort of pastry. The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly fine.

Beethoven's father was a tipsy tenor employed as a singer by the archbishop-elect of Cologne. His mother, Maria Magdalena Laym, had worked for that same dignitary, washing dishes in his kitchen. The family lived in Bonn, where their master spent most of his time. The child's full name was Ludwig van Beethoven—not *von* Beethoven as it is so frequently spelled in many of the editions of his works by German publishers. The Beethovens were of Dutch-Flemish origin. They had little German blood in their veins—a detail which to-day would fill old Ludwig's heart with great satisfaction. For he was a firm believer in human rights. Indeed, we might call him an out-and-out radical when it came to anything connected with social inequalities.

How Beethoven survived in the antediluvian atmosphere of the old world of the Habsburgs will ever remain one of history's best-guarded secrets. But Gibraltar still stands, in spite of a million years of storms and hurricanes, and when it came to strength of character, Beethoven was worth a dozen Gibaltars.

At the age of five Ludwig began his musical career, not because he felt the urge to spend hours and hours every day scraping on his little fiddle, but because his father, who was always in need of money for his tap-room bills, had somehow heard of the fortune Leopold Mozart had made out of exploiting his children. What Leopold Mozart could do, Ludwig van Beethoven's father could also do. It was all a matter of the right

charity—pots of soup for the wife of a day-labourer who had just had her seventeenth child and knitted woollen sweaters for her other brats. No, they did something that was much harder to do. Whenever they discovered a child who gave evidence of being exceptionally talented (regardless of along what lines) they would seek him (or her) out, invite him into their homes, and try and give him enough social polish that his subsequent career might be a little less difficult.

The people of the eighteenth century had a profound respect for talent and for genius too, whenever they happened to recognize it—a most difficult thing to do. But they also believed in that Discipline (with a capital *D*) which is the basis of all art—the art of living included. And they were convinced that good manners had never yet prevented anyone from becoming a great musician or painter or author. Therefore, they provided the manners, while the child looked after his daily exercises on the clavichord or the blackboard. On the whole, the results bore them out in their contention that this was the best way to educate a youngster.

To-day young Beethoven would have been at a tremendous disadvantage. He was both shy and overbearing. He was very proud and as sensitive as *Mimosa pudica*. He was a bad mixer. He was an ungracious receiver of gifts, and Dale Carnegie would have predicted a dire future for one who so deeply disregarded the necessity of making friends and influencing people. But the good city of Bonn of a hundred and fifty years ago was kind to this uncommonly gifted boy, in spite of himself, in spite of his rude outbursts of uncontrollable anger, in spite of his awkwardness when in the presence of women, and his unpleasant way of insisting upon a general recognition of his genius.

And so, notwithstanding all his manifest handicaps, the son of the tipsy court singer somehow managed to scrape together an education. He never became a shining light of fashion. All his livelong days he remained inexcusably careless about his outward appearance. At table he usually behaved like Dr Johnson. His unconquerable shyness made him commit acts of gross incivility like that famous episode when he refused to lift his hat to a mere king. Let the mere king salute him first. For was he not the Jupiter of music? But again, in spite of all this, he had been polished up sufficiently during these years in Bonn to be able to hold his own in almost any kind of society. And when occasionally he fell from grace, the mighty ones of this earth and their friends were sufficiently impressed by his talents to overlook these very painful outbreaks of bad manners. After all, he was a poor devil who had enjoyed very few advantages, so why not take him as he was? There were enough people in Vienna who knew how to hand a grand duchess a cup of chocolate with just the right kind of bow and the appropriate compliment. But

that this had been affected by a disease for which there was to be no cure until more than a hundred years later. And so the poor man was left to the mercies of any mountebank who advertised that he had a definite cure for deafness.

Did Beethoven himself suspect the real reason? I feel inclined to say yes. Otherwise he would never have written those heart-breaking words in his so-called "will"—a document found after his death and addressed to his brother. Therein he expresses the fervent wish that posterity will not share the opinion of so many of his own contemporaries who think of him as an old grouch, as a hermit who hates his neighbours and shuns their society. How could they ever come to think of him in that light, he exclaims in despair, of him, Ludwig van Beethoven, whose love for his fellow-men included not only mankind but creation itself? (*"Seid umschlungen, Millionen, Einen Kuss der ganzen Welt!"*) How was it possible even to suspect him of such feelings when he, more than anyone else, wanted to penetrate to the very soul of the human race and bring it nearer to Almighty God by the music he wrote?

For there was another curious side to his character which I have already mentioned but which has often been overlooked—his deep piety. Because of his interest in the nobler principles of the French Revolution as laid down in the Rights of Man, he has often been suspected of Jacobinism, of Bolshevism—while his admiration for Napoleon's genius has caused others to infer that he was at heart a totalitarian, a tyrant-worshipper.

Neither accusation contains a grain of truth. Beethoven, being profoundly interested in everything affecting the human race, went through the same spiritual development through which almost all sensitive persons have passed since the end of the last great war. He was horrified by the senseless cruelty of the Reign of Terror, and his erasure, in the Third Symphony, of that dedication to "the Hero" (and when he wrote it there was only one hero with a capital *H*) shows how he felt about Napoleon after he had betrayed his own past and had proved himself the worst despot of all. And I can't see anything at all in these accusations of radicalism except the thoughtless utterances of people who will call everybody a Red who does not share their own view that the world, having reached its final state of perfection when they themselves were born, must now be left *in statu quo* and must never again be changed.

Beethoven's lack of hearing cut him almost completely off from the companionship of his fellow-men. In the year 1824 he tried for the last time to conduct a concert, but had to give up in the middle of the performance, as he had no idea what his musicians were doing. After that he could only communicate with the outside world by means of little slips



GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER HAD BEEN A SOLDIER WITH NAPOLEON  
IN RUSSIA



health during the retreat from Moscow (he was lucky to come back alive at all), but financially, too, it meant his ruin. His business was gone, and he was obliged to begin all over again, and the struggle to make a living for his family in a country completely exhausted by twenty years of French domination, and from which every movable piece of valuable property had been taken away by the conquerors, proved too much for him. It took three generations to win back what had been lost. Yet until the very end, so my grandmother told me, the old man had remained loyal to the memory of his hero. He was happy to see his native land regain its independence. Occasionally he would even criticize the Emperor severely for the mistakes he had made during the latter half of his career. But he would always insist that if he were given the chance again, he would do exactly what he had done the first time.

"The Emperor knew best," he used to say, "but sometimes he was badly advised. He was betrayed by those who were supposed to be his friends. And he should have known moderation. But what will you? He was the Emperor!"

I knew this mysterious ancestor only from hearsay. All that was left of him were the buttons of the uniform he had worn when, broken in body, he had finally found his way back to his native village, not far from Rotterdam, and had settled down to his old profession of watchmaker. And so we were to meet one who had worshipped but had repented and one who had remained faithful unto the end.

A strange combination—the Emperor Napoleon, Ludwig van Beethoven, and a very humble link in the chain that connects me with one of those hundreds of ancestors whose dust has long since mingled with that of the land in which I was born.

Two of our guests arrived punctually. The third one (I need not tell you who) came a few minutes late, excused himself, looked at the familiar little figure in the worn-out old overcoat, but without any outward sign of respect, and said in his best Viennese, "*Gn' Abend, Majestät.*"

As for poor Grandpa, he had dressed up for the occasion in his best corporal's uniform, very much the worse for a century of moths. But he had somehow succeeded in patching up the worst holes, and his gun (God knows why he brought it, but he did!) shone as if he had been called out for an imperial inspection.

I wondered what Grandpa would do when he found himself under the same roof with the Emperor. I had been rather afraid that there would be a scene, that he would weep or shout "Hooray!" or something like that. But Grandpa behaved with great dignity. He presented arms and

waited until he was spoken to. The Emperor too immediately fell into his old rôle.

"What is your name, *mon brave*?" he asked.

The name was given.

"What regiment?"

The name of the regiment was given.

"What battalion?" The name of the battalion was given.

"Then you must have been at Borodino!"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"On the right flank?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Did you get wounded?"

"A shot through the left arm, your Majesty, but it amounted to nothing!"

"And you came back safely?"

"Yes, your Majesty. I lost three fingers of my left hand."

He held his hand out for the Emperor's inspection. Napoleon took it in both of his and said softly, "It is the hand of a brave man."

"Thank you, your Majesty. It is ready to fight for you again."

And that was all.

During the rest of the evening Napoleon treated the old soldier as one of his comrades in arms, addressed him as *mon caporal*, and even drank his health after we had sat down. Whereupon Grandpa (who proved to be really a very nice if somewhat simple person) lifted up his glass and said, "To the day of our revenge, your Majesty!"

It came as somewhat of a shock to meet such devotion in a person who had been dead for more than a century. It gave me cause to think. But then the whole of that evening upset so many of my former ideas that I shall never forget it. For during the next five hours I was to learn more about the so-called psychology of history than I had done during the previous forty years which I had spent with my nose buried in my books. I shall now relate what happened that others may profit by my own experience.

We started with a piece of Grétry, but we soon sent up word to Hein to stop the gramophone, for Napoleon paid absolutely no attention, and Beethoven apparently did not hear a note. In the beginning we had tried to talk to him, pretending we knew nothing about his deafness. But soon this proved to be hopeless, whereafter we resorted to short written communications during which I made myself popular with poor Ludwig

subjects. Had they only let me do this, to-day they would have been the richest people on earth."

I knew that he was lying, but somehow or other I did not quite find the courage to tell him so. Frits too was fascinated, and so we both sat very quietly as the Emperor continued his monologue. For the whole of that evening developed into an endless harangue by the Emperor. Beethoven was too deaf to follow the conversation, and Great-great-grandpa was too far gone in his admiration to say anything but an occasional, "How true that all is!"

Soon the table looked like a battlefield. Not a dish was in its place. For the Continental blockade was followed by the Emperor's campaign in the east, which had led to the destruction of Prussia. And after Prussia (to the despair of Jo, who no sooner had placed a dish on the table than it became Italy or Poland), we had to be shown how Wellington had failed to understand the situation in Spain and how the collapse of the French in Spain had been entirely due to the incompetence of brother Joseph, who had been pretty good at diplomacy but had been completely lacking in those administrative qualities which alone would have enabled him to dominate a people as difficult as the Spaniards.

Then followed a discussion of the wickedness of the English in bombarding and destroying the city of Copenhagen. The wickedness of perfidious Albion seemed to be his favourite theme, for it occurred again and again and it was only interrupted by sneering remarks about the stupidity of Tsar Alexander, who, if he had only known what was good for him, would have joined hands with the French Emperor, in which case the two of them, as Napoleon felt convinced, could have divided the whole of the planet between them.

And so it went while the food grew cold. Beethoven, despairing of getting anything more to eat, withdrew more and more into himself and began to wave his arms as if he were conducting an orchestra, and Frits and I sat speechless, for here we were learning our history (or, at least, one version of it) from the man who had been directly responsible for almost twenty years of bloodshed and destruction.

Finally, as there seemed no other way of putting an end to this deluge of words, Frits suggested that we should have our coffee in front of the fire, but this did not do the slightest good. The moment we had made ourselves comfortable, the Emperor helped himself to the pewter mugs and plates that were standing all over the room and used these to demonstrate the plans he had made for the good of Europe and for the ultimate benefit of all mankind.

It was a strange evening—a very strange evening. For shortly after eleven o'clock we at last had reached the subject of Russia. There, as we

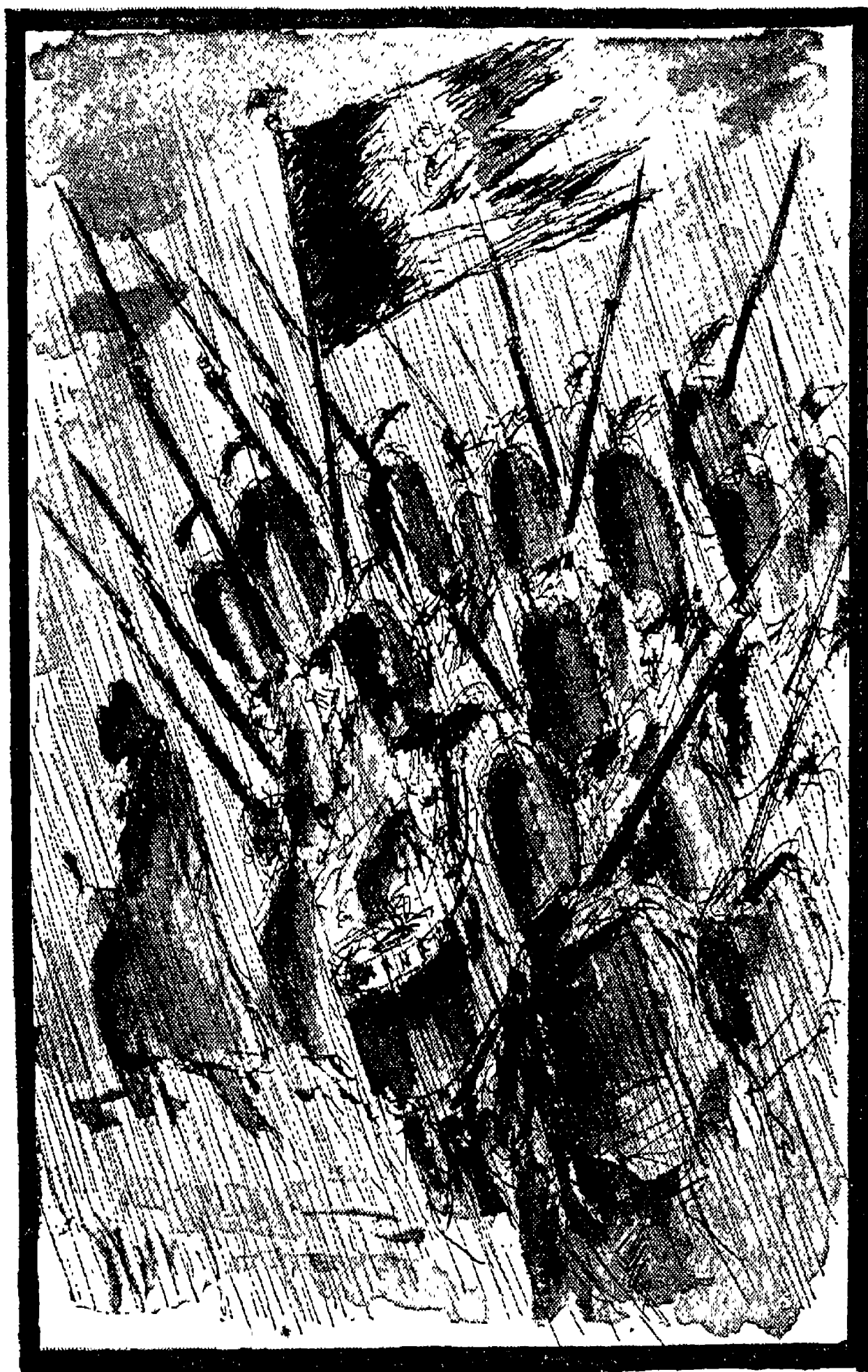
hundred thousand men. I had time to study my maps. Before I started on a campaign I knew every road, every river, the number of houses in every village. I knew where my heavy artillery could go. I knew where I could take care of my wounded. When I got to a place, even some God-forsaken hamlet in Poland, the whole terrain was as familiar to me as the streets of Ajaccio.

“In 1812 I had to leave that part of the campaign to others. That’s why I lost. Why hadn’t my embassy in Petersburg told me about those Russian roads? I should have remembered what Metternich once told me. He was a scoundrel, but a clever one. I should have prised him loose from my dear father-in-law in Austria. Then I should have won, and there never would have been a Waterloo. I should have won at Leipzig, and my great-great-grandson would now be on the throne of France.

“But, no, the Prince must stick to his silly old Vienna. He probably liked the Viennese women better than the Parisian ones, for which I don’t blame him. But it was Metternich—I am sure it was he—who once told me—I have forgotten when or where, but I distinctly remember what he said. I was talking about Europe. I was explaining my plans for Europe, and he smiled (he thought that he could make me uncomfortable by his superior way of smiling) and answered, ‘Europe, your Majesty! What is Europe? A little bit of land that stops where the post roads end.’ And he was right. Ten miles east of Vienna the post roads came to an end. What lay beyond was Asia.

“Still, I should have known better. I used to beat my enemies because always I knew just a little more than they did. I was grossly careless about Russia. I should have found out that the roads are mere ruts and that those ruts were a metre and a half apart. My wheel bases were some fifteen centimetres wider, so they never fitted into those ruts. The horses had to do twice as much work. They tired twice as fast. The fodder they had to eat was always wet, for the dew is heavy in that part of the world. They sickened and died. The wheels got bent and broken, and we had no spare parts. We should have had! We had no wheelwrights. We should have had them! Everything got slowed down, and I, who had always timed everything so perfectly, was three months late. Had I been in Moscow in July the war would have been over in August. Alexander could not have held out that long. My armies would have been back in Germany in October, and I should not have lost a hundred thousand men. As it was, I had to fight both nature and man. I defeated man, but nature defeated me.”

Here Napoleon paused and looked at us with the appealing eyes of a very small boy who has just tried to explain that, honest to goodness, he



THESE OLD SOLDIERS HAD ARISEN FROM THEIR GRAVES TO PROTECT  
THEIR EMPEROR



**BEETHOVEN HAD FORGOTTEN HIS HAT AND AN OLD MANUSCRIPT**

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE GREATEST INVENTOR OF ALL TIME Puts Us to Considerable Inconvenience

**F**RITS said it was my fault, and I said it was his fault. We left the final decision to Jimmie, and she remarked, "Oh, well, I suppose it was just one of those things. If I were you I would forget about it. But the next time you should be a little more careful and not quite so romantic."

As a matter of fact, I don't think that it was a romantic streak which had got us into this unpleasant experience. Rather, I would call it some sudden impulse to be a little more modern—a little more up-to-date than we had been until then—that had made us send out this invitation we had addressed to the Greatest Inventor of All Time.

I know it sounded very boy-scoutish, but we had been entirely sincere when we expressed the wish to meet the man who, in the eyes of one better fitted to judge than we, had contributed most of all to the progress of the human race.

We had not the slightest idea who would knock at our door that next Saturday evening. We talked about it and did a little guessing. We even mentioned a few names—Edison and Barthold Schwartz, who by inventing gunpowder had given the average man of the Middle Ages a chance to hold his own against the ironclad warriors of the feudal castle. There had been other candidates, such as Marconi, who gave us wireless, and Wilbur Wright, who, together with his brother Orville, had enabled us to fly. We even had thought that Leonardo da Vinci might give us the pleasure of his company, although we feared that most of his inventions had been of a theoretical rather than a practical nature. But when Saturday came, we really had not the slightest idea whom we were going to meet.

Well, the joke was on us, and it was a pretty costly joke, for we had to pay for a lot of crockery, and had to settle a not insignificant bill for broken furniture.

As we had sometimes been able to meet our guests along the harbour or on the streets of Veere, Frits and I had decided that we would leave the house at half-past six and saunter forth to see what we would see. But Veere looked very much as it always did on a Saturday night in the autumn when the wind and occasional gusts of rain made most people prefer the warm comfort of the inside of their homes to the cold gloom of the big out-of-doors.



THE GREATEST INVENTOR OF ALL TIME HAD A MOST HEALTHY APPETITE



## CHAPTER XIV

### PLATO and CONFUCIUS May Seem to Make Strange Dinner Companions, But They Got Along Very Nicely and Seemed to Enjoy Themselves and Each Other

I HAD promised Erasmus that from then on I would add the Christian names of our guests when I sent out our invitations. But the very first time I tried to do so, I had all sorts of trouble, for neither Plato nor Confucius had been Christians, and even after a most diligent examination of a great many learned tomes I remained uncertain as to by what names their mothers had addressed them when they told them to come in, wash their hands and faces, and get ready for dinner.

No harm, however, was done by this omission. Everything came off as it should have, and this time there was no reason to shout for the police. Apparently there had been only one Plato and one Confucius in all history, and we got the right people, as we knew the moment they came into the room.

Both our guests were familiar to us, Plato from his statues and Confucius from his pictures, but even without such concrete advance information we could never have been mistaken in their identity, for both men seemed the incarnation of dignity.

But let me stick to my regular routine and first tell you what kind of meal we ordered for these strange guests.

I would hate to be a cook in heaven. So many people from so many parts of the world (decent heathens, too, are allowed in my kind of heaven), and running all the way from cave-men to penthouse dwellers, must be hard to satisfy, for what is Dutch *gehakt* to one is Philadelphia meat-roll to another.

So far, we had been rather fortunate in satisfying the tastes of all our guests, but I did not know how long our luck would hold out. Of the Chinese I knew nothing except that they are rice-eaters—at least those fortunate enough to eat at all. But my friends who have been in the Orient tell me that I must discard all my ideas about Chinese cooking in so far as these may have been derived from eating in chop-suey places in America. The Chinese have never heard of chop suey.

“Well, then,” I used to ask, “what do they eat?”

“They eat messy stuff.”

“Always?”

"Always."

"Like the rest of the East?"

"Exactly."

However, on the occasion of a more or less formal dinner given to one of the most formal of men who ever lived, I could not just open a lot of tin cans I had ordered from the Java store in Amsterdam and say, "Here you are, buddies—help yourselves." After a great deal of thumbing of my culinary library I finally came upon a dish that seemed perfect.

A pilau is one of the few blessings the Turks have bestowed upon the West. It can be made out of almost any kind of meat or fowl, and the rice would be just the thing for Confucius. I had no idea about Plato's preferences, but, being a Greek of the fourth century B.C., he would undoubtedly be a very abstemious sort of person, and we would have plenty of olives for him in case the pilau was not satisfactory. When Jo asked what to put into the pilau I told her to use chicken. For I happen to prefer chicken to beef and veal. I hate lamb in every shape and form, and I am not allowed to eat pork. In this way I should be certain that I myself would get what I wanted, and that is about as good a principle for a host to follow as any other I can think of.

Celery seemed to suggest itself as the most logical of vegetables for an occasion of this sort. *Apium graveolens* is a harmless kind of weed which rarely provokes man's passions into the violence caused by mentioning either spinach or cauliflower. Furthermore, it was held in high esteem by the ancients as a mild aphrodisiac. This might not recommend it to Plato, who, according to his most trustworthy contemporaries, was too deeply engrossed in his political, scientific, and social contemplations to have any spare time for studying the interesting problems connected with applied biology.

There was to be no regular dessert, but I intended to have the table full of small dishes filled with all the rather messy things we could buy at any store dealing in Oriental candies—bits of nougat, Turkish delight, Algerian sweetmeats, and whatever else we could find that was highly sugary. Wines? I had no idea. But neither of our guests would be conscious of the pressed grapes, and we had a lot of odds and ends of bottles bought for previous occasions. In this way we would be able to save some money, and these dinners, as we were beginning to notice, were running into much higher figures than we had expected. Not that we minded. They were the best investments both Frits and I had ever made, and when the crash came (as it did shortly afterwards) we at least had had something for our money.

Problem No. III. How about music?

Of Greek music I knew nothing, and the Chinese music I had heard in

weaver of words and a not very heroic exponent of certain theories of government which had no connexion whatsoever with the world as it happened to be. But my peaceful years in Veere had put me into a sort of contemplative mood in which I was better able to understand what Plato had tried to prove.

It should be remembered that the Plato we know was much more appreciated during the Middle Ages and Renaissance than during the centuries following immediately upon his death. For Greece had ceased to exist as an independent nation. The Greek people had deliberately committed suicide by their everlasting quarrelling among themselves and by their attempts to establish a working democracy in a society of which 90 per cent. of the population were slaves.

Plato, therefore, was not unlike those modern European students of statecraft who spin their yarns about an ideal state, with one eye on the Gestapo and the other on the nearest exit to the Lisbon clipper and the U.S.A. Five hundred years from to-day we may discover their books in the places where they now lie hidden and then we will be astonished at the brilliant way in which those moderns had discussed the methods by which it might have been possible to save European civilization. But we also know that nothing came of their beautiful dreams because reality overtook them before they had finished their tasks and had thrown them into those concentration camps from which they were never again to emerge and in which they died of neglect, brutality, and starvation.

Plato, too, wrote his guide-book to applied politics at the very moment when it could no longer be of any practical use to anyone. Shortly after his death the great tyrant from the north gobbled up the whole of the eastern world, and Greece was reduced to the rank of a seventh-rate province, and an insignificant part of that vast Macedonian empire which a few years later, was to reach from the Danube to the Indus. Plato therefore worked in a void. The glory of the age of Pericles, when Athens had dominated the ancient world, was still vividly remembered, but so was the shame of the years immediately afterwards, when the barbarians from Sparta, who had always believed in converting their butter into spear-points, deliberately destroyed what the Athenians had so painfully built up and left the city, once presided over by Pallas Athene, a mere ruin, its walls gone, its public buildings destroyed, and its population decimated by the plague.

But while it had been possible to destroy the physical part of the city which for four long centuries had been the centre of ancient civilization, it had proved much more difficult to extinguish that beacon of "enlightenment through actual observation" which the Athenian scientists and philosophers had erected on the shores of the Ægean Sea. And while

Now let me give you a few dates to fix Plato's activities definitely on your mind. He was born in or about the year 427 B.C., two years after the death of Pericles. In 404 Athens, after a war of almost thirty years, surrendered to Sparta and lost its walls and its navy and its leading position among the small nations that went to make up ancient Hellas. A decade or two after 400 Xenophon wrote his dullish book which all little boys who have studied Greek these last twenty-three hundred years have had to read and which I mention only to show how far the Greeks had fallen from their former high estate. Ten thousand Greeks were obliged to hire out to the Persians as mercenaries. A hundred years before, they themselves would have done the hiring.

Meanwhile Athens was passing rapidly through all sorts and kinds of government, from a not very happy experiment with a short-lived oligarchy to an even more disastrous interval of pure democracy, when the fair name of Athens was for ever disgraced by the judicial murder of Socrates.

That happened in the year 399, and Socrates of course was the teacher of Plato. Use this year 399 as the peg on which to hang the whole development of Plato.

Plato made three trips to Syracuse to which he was called as a consultant in political matters by the tyrant who was then at the head of the Government of this old Corinthian settlement. At that time Plato still seemed to have lived under the delusion that some time—somewhere—some great leader would arise who would send for him in a letter, reading somewhat as follows:

MY DEAR PROFESSOR:

You are supposed to know more about government than any other living human being. I have everything under control here. I run this town, and everybody knows that I am the boss. No rich businessman can put anything over on me because he has bought up the local legislators, as there is no legislature which can be bought. No cheap demagogue can so much as open his mouth or grab a few millions by forcing himself upon the local labour unions, for I don't allow any. I see to it that the working-man gets decent wages and is fairly treated, and therefore he needs no organization to force the employers into doing the right thing by him. We have an army and a navy, but any officer who ever is seen to talk to one of our former politicians is hanged right away.

As for our women, they enjoy the same rights as the men. The bright ones are not held in any greater respect than their less intelligent menfolk merely because they happen to be women. We recognize the necessity of continuing the population, but we take motherhood for granted as something that is part of nature, like rain or sunshine or the

devote himself exclusively to training a few choice disciples in the science of statecraft.

He lived to be almost eighty years old, but he spent the latter half of his life as the head of a private school and never got himself mixed up with local politics.

This institute of the higher learning was situated in a grove near Athens. This grove was consecrated to the memory of Academus, the Greek hero who, according to legend, had told Castor and Pollux where Theseus had hidden Helen. Outside his academic labours, Plato found time to write the thirteen epistles and the thirty-five dialogues in which he discussed every possible problem of life (and therefore of politics and statecraft) which for one reason or another struck him as a fit subject for debate with his students.

The esteem in which these 'conversations' were held is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that practically all of them have survived. Whereas the greater part of ancient literature has been irredeemably lost (including some of the holy books of the early Christians), the works of Plato were always most carefully preserved. Even during those chaotic centuries which followed in the wake of the fall of Rome, when the new creed not merely murdered some of the most distinguished exponents of the old Platonic philosophy but also burned their books wherever they found them, there were always a sufficient number of faithful Platonic scholars to hide at least enough copies of these priceless treasures to save them for posterity.

As a result we are thoroughly familiar with the ideas of this greatest of the writers of antiquity, and there never has been a moment during the twenty-three centuries which separate us from Plato when he has failed to influence at least a few of the brighter spirits of our race. For example, we find traces of Plato in the writings of most of the founding fathers of the Church. The medieval scholastics, in spite of their devotion to Aristotle, were very apt to be influenced by Plato, and the eighteenth century, the great age of universal enlightenment, was thoroughly Platonic, in spite of its endlessly repeated love for the average man. To-day, amid the fury of conflicts let loose by that antithesis of Plato's ideal of the true leader (I am sorry, but I have to refer once more to Adolf Hitler), the name of the great Athenian has been somewhat eclipsed by the prophets of violence and cruelty who now seem to be in full command of the situation. But watch my words! The moment some semblance of reason returns to our unfortunate planet, Plato will again come into his own.

It is true that at times he will exasperate us by being entirely too academic and by behaving as if he lived in a vacuum and had never heard of the human race. But that is merely one of the 'defects of his qualities,'



THERE, AT THE FOOT OF THE ACROPOLIS, PLATO HAD DONE HIS TEACHING

They must flatter the mob, and as a result all standards are debased by an increasing amount of vulgarity. Manners too are coarsened because there is no one to show them any better, and soon it becomes apparent that just as the mad pursuit of wealth must eventually destroy oligarchy, in the same way the excess of liberty must destroy democracy. And then there is another period of decline, for, in such a state, anarchy gains until it presently finds its way into all private houses and even ends by getting hold of the animals. Fathers get accustomed to descend to the level of their sons, and the sons behave with insolence towards their fathers, as they no longer have any fear of them. The teacher begins to stand in awe of his pupils, and as a result the pupils despise their teachers. From that moment on, young and old are equal, and the young are ready to compete with the old both in word and deed, while the old feebly imitate the young. In the end, all horses and donkeys begin to march along with the rights and dignities of freemen, and everything is just ready to burst with liberty.

"And what is the result?

"That the excessive increase of this so-called liberty causes a reaction in the opposite direction, for an excess of liberty, whether in nations or in individuals, seems duly to pass into slavery, and the most aggravated form of tyranny arises invariably out of the most extreme form of liberty, for the moment liberty becomes licence, dictatorship is near. The rich, afraid that the prevailing democracy will rob them of their last farthing, begin to think of ways and means to overthrow their enemies, and at that moment some enterprising leader is apt to seize power. He does this by promising everything to the poor. Then he surrounds himself with an army, kills first his opponents and next those of his friends who might be dangerous. Having purged the state, he establishes himself as tyrant—as sole ruler.

"And under such conditions," as Plato (in the rôle of Socrates) is careful to point out, "there is no longer any room for the philosopher who preaches moderation and mutual understanding. The poor philosopher is now like a man fallen among the wild beasts and, if he is wise, he will retire, while there is still time, and take shelter under a wall while the storm passes by."

And there you have the *leitmotiv* of Plato's whole career. While the storm is raging, there is nothing the man of a contemplative turn of mind can do. Let him take shelter and there prepare for the day when the people will perhaps listen to reason. He emphasizes the 'perhaps,' for like Confucius he is not quite certain whether that day will ever come. But don't go out on the ramparts and take an active part in the battle. Any well-trained gladiator—some half-witted but strong-armed barbarian

carefully trained to the use of arms—will be infinitely better at the business of fighting and killing than a man who has spent all his life playing with ideas instead of bombs. It is not cowardice that makes the philosopher take this step. It is his sense of the fitness of things, for he realizes that, being a doctor of the soul, he is in a way not unlike the doctor of the body, who is also found behind the lines and not in the front ranks.

Having settled those matters to his own satisfaction and finding that his ideas worked (at least on paper), Plato concentrated all his efforts upon trying to discover how the human race could be made to behave according to the laws of reason, by what methods those elements which might be dangerous to such a development could be eradicated, and how the perfect state could be established in very much the same way as a better breed of horses or cows or pigs or sheep or bees or grain could be developed out of the inferior varieties with which the world was only too familiar.

A most noble and most praiseworthy idea! And one with which the greatest minds of all times have occupied themselves at some period of their lives. Some of them approached it from the solemn and dignified angle, which was so characteristic of Plato. Others, like the carpenter-teacher from Nazareth, tried to solve the difficulty by placing the human race under the direct superintendence of God. Still others, like Voltaire and Dean Swift, chose satire as their mode of attack. Thomas More thought he could do most good by putting a sort of china egg into mankind's nest—a china egg he called Utopia. Descartes endeavoured to give us a solution by an application of pure mathematics. Spinoza gave it an ethical twist. Karl Marx took economics as his particular field of research. Rabelais clowned everything in a world of his own making. And there have been all sorts of philosophers, sages, and master-minds (genuine and not quite so genuine) of the in-between variety who starved in garrets and died in cellars, that they might bestow upon their fellow-men a blueprint of salvation, searching heaven and hell for an answer to the all-important question, "How can we possibly save mankind from itself?"

But in the end they were like Omar the Tentmaker (one of the most interesting and stimulating of all the seekers after truth), who summed up his own lifelong investigations in this simple quatrain:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about: but evermore  
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

Ever since I began to interest myself in the men who fought so violently to take mankind definitely out of the class of the animals by providing it

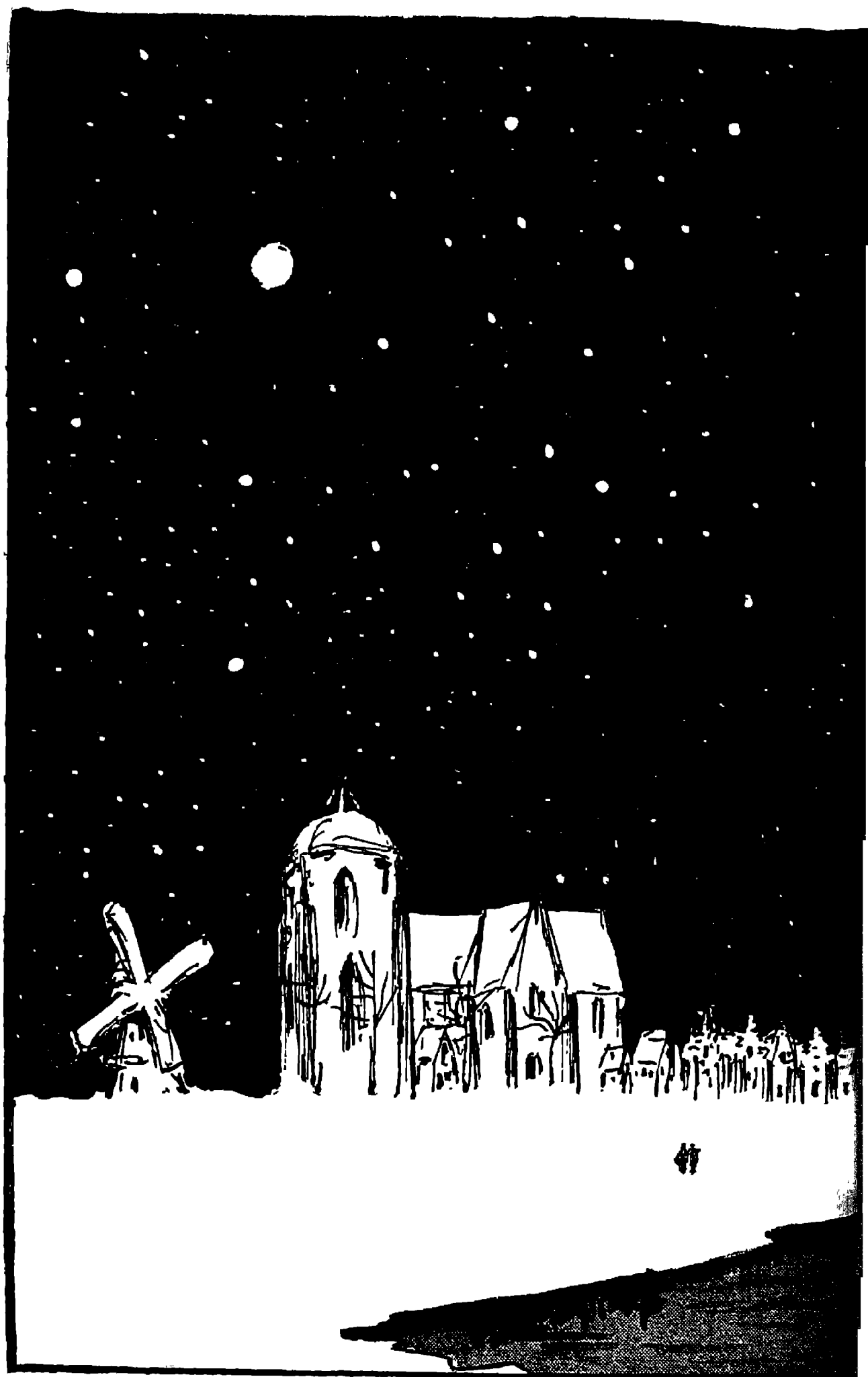


But what would become of the leisure which made it possible for them to do this—to exist free from all economic cares—what would become of it when a new tide set in and deprived them of their economic security? Plato never even seems to have considered such a possibility, and that, it seems to me, was his greatest weakness. Even in his own little world (and, after all, it was a very small world compared with what was to follow), where it would have been comparatively easy to educate the few thousand free people who made up a Greek state, war and violence had been the order of the day. What would happen when Christianity, having preached the doctrine of human equality, should rid the world of slavery (even if it took some nineteen centuries to do so) and when hundreds of millions of other men and women should feel the necessity of some actual participation in affairs of State?

American history throws a very illuminating light upon this problem. As long as we were merely thirteen small colonies in which practically everybody could know everybody else, it was possible for a small group of leaders, animated by the four Platonic virtues, to run the republic. The Washingtons, the Adamses, the Jeffersons, and the Madisons had been deeply influenced by the philosophy of Plato. All of them were still profoundly conscious of their duty towards the State. From childhood on, it had been hammered into their heads that since they had been born with certain advantages over their fellow-men, they were also expected to exert themselves more than these other less fortunate ones and that they therefore must become shining examples of courage, justice, reasonableness, and piety—in the broadest sense of that oft-misused word. In short, each one was not only aware of the Bill of Rights, which was part of the law of the land, but also of an unwritten Bill of Duties, which was an inseparable part of his own code of ethics. And because they moved and had their being in small communities it was possible for their neighbours to weigh them carefully on the scales of public opinion and to accept them or reject them as they deemed fit and necessary.

Therein, I believe, lies the greatest weakness of all the Platos from the fourth century B.C. until about a hundred years ago. Conditions have changed so completely that there is no longer any safe basis for comparison. But there is another Plato, less well known to most people and often entirely unsuspected. That is the Plato who, having studied individual men and having observed them as they react to certain political and social stimuli, thereupon goes behind and beyond them and tries to come to some understanding of the invisible forces which have made them what they are, who finally tries to reduce these many forces to a single source—to God.

As a small boy I was taught that the Jews, and after them the Christians,



STANDING THERE, LIKE IMMANUEL KANT, WITH THE STARRY HEAVEN



DVE US AND THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE IN OUR HEARTS

to call Plato an "intellectual snob" and then dismiss him as one who has no business in our kind of democracy. I cannot agree at all with this point of view. Plato was an artist and therefore an aristocrat, a man to whom the best alone is good enough and who will accept no compromises in the matter of life's essentials. In an era when to most people the second best is good enough, Plato will suffer a temporary eclipse, but his hour will come again, though neither you nor I, my beloved friend, will be here to see it.

And now to far-away places and a land that is a complete mystery to most of us, myself very much included. I have never been to China, but that does not mean that I have never met any Chinese. Indeed, I have, and I have found the poorer ones admirable in their industry and their good-natured cheerfulness. I hear that when they go bad they do so in a great big way, but those I have known well were as a rule possessed of certain qualities of patience and application which put them shoulder-high above their white and brown and black neighbours, especially the white ones. As for the educated ones, they were so far beyond me in every respect that they made me feel ashamed of myself.

What I liked in the Chinese more than anything else were their truly Erasmian spirit of tolerance, their resemblance to Montaigne in his most delightful contemplative mood, and their wit (ribald or otherwise), which gave everything they said or wrote a pleasant Rabelaisian touch. And finally they had a very delicate feeling for the inner sense of things and were rarely guilty of those gaucheries which Western people so often confuse with honesty. My friends who were thoroughly familiar with China and the Chinese never cease to tell me that this picture is much too flattering. They inform me that the Chinese are also possessed of a high degree of low cunning, that they are apt to be grossly materialistic in their approach towards their daily existence, that they can be very cruel and entirely indifferent about the suffering of their fellow-men, and that their outward calm does not at all correspond to that inner peace of soul which we suspect behind their gaily smiling eyes.

All of which may be perfectly true. The Pacific paradise in which I had always believed from the circumstantial evidence left behind by the early travellers and some of the fugitives from our own civilization did not exactly come up to the sad truth I beheld with my own eyes when, a great many years later, I was able to visit that incredibly lovely part of our planet. But when I set foot on Tahiti and Hawaii and saw the hideous things civilization had done to these benighted natives, I forced myself to remember that for a century and a half these poor creatures had been exposed to the tender ministrations of the white whaler, the white trader,

daily existence for the next twenty-five hundred years and which, at this moment, seems to be as vital as ever.

I am sorry that I can only give you second-hand information about this famous sage, for the Chinese language is a closed book to me, and I am now much too old to learn it.

At the age of twenty K'ung-fu-tse entered on his career as a Government official and was appointed manager of the gardens and public fields of the province which to-day is called Shantung. That means, incidentally, that the Chinese Government was already interested in a planned economy at a time when our own ancestors were still nomads and lived that hand-to-mouth existence which kept them for ever on the brink of starvation.

A regular career in the civil service does not seem to have appealed very greatly to young K'ung, and soon afterwards he resigned to become a school-teacher. He was twenty-two years old when he took that step. He had been married three years and had one son. This son begat other sons, and I am informed by my Chinese friends that the story of there still being direct descendants of the great sage is true. The K'ung family therefore has succeeded in maintaining itself in the direct line for some sixty generations, and that in itself is a considerable record, for we have not a single Italian family that goes back to the days of ancient Rome, and a western European family that can trace its genealogy back beyond the fifteenth century is as rare as a really warm day in England.

And so at the age of twenty-two we find our hero as head of a school of his own, but a very peculiar institute of learning, for it did not teach the usual curriculum but specialized in making its pupils conscious of the existence of good and evil and undertook to instruct them in how to acquire virtue and how to avoid vice. The only conditions of admission (that, too, was rather unusual from our modern point of view) were a serious desire for wisdom and an industrious application to one's studies. There were no fees. Those who came from rich homes were expected to pay for the upkeep of the poor scholars who brought nothing with them but the clothes on their backs and a wooden bowl from which to eat their frugal meals of rice.

The school attracted widespread attention. Two sons of one of the princely houses in the province of Lu were sent by their parents to sit at the feet of this strange young master. When their families suggested that their tutor accompany them on their grand tour (this smacks of the Europe of the eighteenth century), he accepted the offer and used this unexpected opportunity to perfect himself in the knowledge of the Chinese language and its music. According to legend, it was on this occasion

acquit himself of his task that the whole of the nation soon became aware of his presence. Then the inevitable happened. Those who formerly had prospered by the unsettled state of affairs (the racketeers and politicians, as we would call them to-day) were finding themselves out of their jobs, and they promptly combined against this over-honest reformer. Rather than fight this rabble, K'ung quietly withdrew and spent the last fifteen years of his life peacefully living in his native province, where he increased the number of his disciples until there were over three thousand of them. Some eighty of these, according to his own testimony, were men of more than outstanding ability and really understood what their teacher meant.

Confucius died at the age of seventy-three, two years after the battle of Salamis, which saved Europe from the invasion of the Persians. According to the disciples who were with him at the moment of his demise, he anticipated his end with great dignity and without any apprehension of a future in which, by the way, he had never believed, for as Confucianism never became a religion, it had no need of either heaven or hell to keep its followers in line. The old gentleman simply withdrew from life when he had grown tired of waiting for that invitation that never came. No great prince, so he was now forced to realize, would ever ask him to become his prime minister and give him his chance to show how a country should be ruled with intelligence and honesty. Just before he sank into his last sleep he composed one of those short and descriptive poems of which the Chinese have always been so extraordinarily fond. It has been preserved and reads almost the same as the quatrain I quoted at the end of my little story about Plato.

The great mountain must crumble,  
The strong beam must break,  
The wise man must wither away like a plant.

The author of Ecclesiastes also was interested in this subject, though he expressed it in a slightly different form. *Vanitas vanitatum—et omnia vanitas*, but the sense is about the same: "Vanity of vanities—all is vanity."

Webster sums Confucianism up as follows: "As a philosophical system it is the basis of much of Chinese ethics, education, statecraft, and religion. Filial piety, benevolence, justice, propriety, intelligence, and fidelity are cardinal virtues." A most exalted code of behaviour and one of which every sensible man must approve.

Christianity has also been actively preaching such a programme for some two thousand years, but these twenty centuries have been an era of violence and cruelty and wholesale murder and theft—of crusades which killed enemy and friend alike—of assault with machine-guns upon natives armed with bows and arrows and of pious padres blessing those horrible

brush and paint inspiring texts all over my grandchildren's schoolroom, I am sure that I shall give them both Kin and Con. That would then make Confucius a sort of Chinese Abe Martin and Abe Martin an Indiana Chinese. And why not? For it is their 'homey' quality, in the best sense of the word, that accounts for their popularity with the masses of plain, ordinary people and for the fact that they succeeded in doing what the much more eloquent philosophers have invariably failed to do. Both of them were country folk, familiar with the people who lived on and of and by the good earth, and both of them were therefore natural philosophers, for no one who is on an intimate footing with nature, who watches the seasons and the tides, and who is dependent for his living upon sunshine and rain can help becoming a kind of village sage. Unless the local witch-doctors get him, in which case he is lost and becomes that most hateful of all of God's creatures, a small-town fanatic.

Now, not even the worst enemies of Confucius—those rulers who hated him so much that as soon as he had died they ordered all his books to be burned—have ever accused him of that. Bigotry and meddling officiousness were abhorrent to him. He was all for the policy of live and let-live. And he was so enthusiastic about the idea of let-live that he sat himself down in his humble but neat and harmonious little house, took out brush and ink box, and asked himself the question, "How and in what manner can I teach my people to go through life with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of contentment?"

Other philosophers and other faith-founders have done the same thing, but none of them have been quite as successful, because Confucius was the only one who had always one eye firmly fixed on that soil he knew so well from his own experience and out of which grew his ideas as well as his cabbages.

The accusation often made that the Confucian creed is lacking in spiritual qualities is undoubtedly true. Confucius was not over-spiritual. He did not deny that there might be a world hereafter, but he felt that the evidence in favour of such a heavenly home and a future life among the blessed was rather vague and depended entirely upon the hearsay of people who had never been there.

On the other hand, the world in which Confucius lived was very much of a tangible fact. Nobody could deny its existence, because it was there for all to see and hear and smell. People could even sit down on it and touch it and, if they were hungry enough (as often happened in China), they could eat it and in that way prolong life for a few more miserable days. As reasonable and intelligent human beings, so Confucius taught, it was up to the human race to make the best of its bad bargain, for with a little reason and intelligence a great many things could be accomplished.

and economic life of any city or village, because they have the money. Furthermore, unless they are complete fools, they are bound to have acquired a certain amount of practical wisdom during their long residence on this earth. Therefore, show the older people that you respect them. That will make them like you, and then in turn you will probably come to like them, and that will establish a good understanding—beneficial to both old and young.

A family will never get anywhere if it is a debating society in which little Lin will contradict his father and will tell his mother that she is talking nonsense. Therefore, encourage the children to be polite and courteous to their parents and let the parents treat their children with understanding and forbearance, for that will make life within the circle of the family harmonious, and it will turn the home into a place in which all of them like to dwell.

A stranger who has never met you before will judge you by your personal appearance. You may have a heart of gold, but that will not be noticeable at first sight, whereas last week's scrambled eggs on the lapel of your coat will be spotted immediately. Therefore, try to look neat. Your clothes may be threadbare and worn, but they can at least be well brushed.

You may, for a time at least, get away with a certain amount of dishonesty in dealing with your fellow-merchants. But in the end your neighbours will find you out, and then there is an end to your commercial career. Therefore, be honest in all your business dealings. If by nature you are inclined to indulge in a little sly crookedness, suppress that instinct, for honesty pays in the end, and you are out to make a living, aren't you?

Often the saint goes about disguised as a beggar. Therefore, be agreeable to beggars, for you may be entertaining a saint.

I might go on for several pages more, but this will give you an idea of my notions about Confucius and what he taught. I know that many of his popular sayings got petrified as time went on, for that seems to be the habit of all maxims. I have also been told that I am much too lenient in my judgment on the old gentleman. At heart, so I am told, he was a good deal of a conservative and even a reactionary who played beautifully into the hands of the ruling classes, who most heartily approved of his insistence upon that respect which all young men should show their elders and upon the subservient attitude with which all subjects should approach their masters. I am inclined to feel that that objection is well taken.

But the same holds good for our own religion. The Christ who is worshipped in St Peter's in Rome is a very different person from the Christ I once met in a poor Lapp church where the dogs lay round the altar



parts of our conversation if there were to be any kind of exchange of ideas—something we could never predict. But Confucius spoke the Lu dialect of the sixth century B.C. No use asking one of our many Dutch friends who knew Chinese to come and help us out that evening, for he probably would no more understand the old philosopher than a Chinese from the extreme north can make sense of what is being said by his cousin from the extreme south. Of course, there was always the possibility of drawing pictures, and I made sure that there would be a plentiful supply of paper and I took out the Chinese fountain-pen Dwight Franklin had once given me (a curious contraption—made out of a brush and a small piece of Chinese ink, kept moist by a little sponge) and I practised my strokes and I prayed for that inspiration without which a European trying his hand at Chinese art is bound to express himself almost as clumsily as an Oriental trying to paint in the Western fashion.

Saturday evening, half-past six. Everything is ready, and Frits and I are sitting in front of the fire, waiting for still another chapter to commence in that incredible experience which has now been ours for almost four months. At a quarter to seven Erasmus slips in, greets us, goes, as is his habit, into the kitchen to address a few kind words to the cook and her husband, and joins us for a small glass of Moselle, which he prefers to the gin which is the common Dutch drink just before dinner. We ask him whether he has brushed up his Plato, and he says yes—that is exactly what he has been doing these last five days.

“I’ve caught you at last!” I say. “You always pretend that you have no idea about whom we intend to invite.”

He laughs and answers. “Oh, well, one goes places and one sometimes hears things.”

As he has not been, as far as we know, out of his study in the town hall, we wonder what “places” he means, but we think that it is better not to touch upon this delicate subject. We want these dinners to continue and do not want to incur any disapproval for an act of unintentional indiscretion.

Three minutes to seven.

There is a knock at the door. Frits’ house still has the old-fashioned Dutch door divided into two parts—a practical arrangement, for in summer it allows you to have a draught in the house while preventing the children from running out into the street. Now the upper part of that door slowly opens, and there stands Confucius. It is easy to recognize him, for he looks exactly like his pictures. Then the lower part of the door too is opened as if by invisible hands, and Confucius enters. He does not offer to shake hands, but to each one of us he bows slowly—

Greek. At first Plato looks puzzled. Then he catches on and repeats to himself what Erasmus has just said. We notice that it sounds very different from the Greek we had learned at school.

As for the two guests of honour, they too now exchange a few complimentary phrases. This takes time, for they have to make use of two interpreters. Then from the upper floor there come the soft notes of a Mozart andante for the flute, and both Plato and Confucius listen with evident delight. When the air has come to an end, they indicate by gestures that they would like to hear some more of the same sort, and I call up to Hein to play Mozart's Quartet for Flute and Strings. Then the moment has come to go to dinner. An extra plate has been set for Confucius' grandson, forty-two times removed, and dinner is served.

The meal, I am glad to say, seems to be entirely satisfactory to our guests, and Plato finds special pleasure in the size of our California olives, which, he tells Erasmus, are almost twice as large as they used to be in his own time, "when," as he adds, "the gods provided us with our meals, for whenever one of my students got hungry, he plucked himself a few fruits from the trees underneath which I used to teach, and we were not forced to interrupt our discussions."

I tell him that is hardly the way we do our teaching nowadays. "Why not?" asks Plato, via Erasmus. "Are not your students interested?"

"Yes," I answer, "but in a different way."

"Is there a different way?" Plato continues his inquiry.

But I prefer to change the conversation. It might lead up to rather painful confessions about the attitude our modern students take towards all problems of learning not immediately connected with the practical purpose of making a living. Jo saves the situation. She has improvised some kind of dessert, and that too is received favourably. Fortunately, Frits has had the bright idea of ordering after-dinner tea instead of coffee. Jo serves it in our best old blue Delft cups, and Confucius notices them, examines them carefully, and tells us that they compare very favourably with some cups he used to have when he lived with the Marquis of Ts'i. Then he adds as a sort of after-thought, "That was in the days when I was still full of hope that I might at last find one ruler willing to give me a chance to put my ideas into actual practice, my ideas about government based directly upon the principles of righteousness and virtue. But the invitation never came. Circumstances were too strong for me. I had only one chance. But the prince soon grew tired, and I was obliged to withdraw."

After our meal, as the night was rather cool, we withdrew to the comforts of the open fire. Erasmus sat in his favourite chair, in which some day we feared he would be roasted alive. Next to him sat Confucius,

a 'moral basis' for its behaviour, not merely as private citizens, but also as members of the community.

And how could this be brought about?

This could only be done by substituting a love for the good of the community at large for the old attitude that man was primarily a predatory animal, for ever in search of his own gain and ready to trample down whosoever came in his way while he was in search of food and lodging and a few extra luxuries (as many as possible) for his own family.

There was no disagreement upon this subject. None at all. But the moment we had reached this conclusion, there we were once more face to face with that perplexing question, "Was there such a moral basis, and if there was, how could a sufficient number of people be persuaded to accept it and to fight for its maintenance with their lives?"

Religion? It had been tried and found wanting.

Education? We had educated and educated and educated, and how much good had it done? It had disseminated a lot of heterogeneous and quite useless information, but it had not noticeably added to the wisdom of the populace.

And so we went on until the hour of departure came.

But this time there was no sudden lowering of the lights, no sudden darkness, no sudden disappearance. Confucius seemed to anticipate that soon the moment would come for us to bid each other good-bye. Some ten minutes before the clock was to strike the hour of midnight, he got up and through his grandson (who had proved to be a most delightful and charming companion) he assured us that it was many centuries since he had enjoyed so delightful an evening. Plato did likewise, though in less flowery language, and even Erasmus was moved to confess that the evening had been almost as pleasant as a night spent at the home of his beloved Thomas More.

Then there were ceremonial bows between all of us. Then the clock struck. Then the candles went out, and Frits and I were left behind with some more delightful memories.

We finished our final cup of tea and looked at each other. "Well," Frits said, "the problem still seems as far removed from a final and successful solution as ever before. What shall we do?"

"Work," I answered. "Work until we find a way out, for otherwise . . ."

"Yes, otherwise?"

"Otherwise there soon won't be any human race left to worry about."

In the kitchen Jo and Hein had turned on the radio. The sound reminded us of the B.B.C. announcement in the six o'clock news earlier in the evening that Adolf Hitler might in the near future become the undisputed leader of the German people.

PETER THE GREAT and CHARLES XII OF SWEDEN Are  
Invited, and VOLTAIRE Comes Anyway, but Is,  
of Course, a Most Welcome Guest

WOULD we ever have another evening like the last one? We doubted it. Not that anything very special had been said or that we had solved a single one of the world's great problems. We had come out by the same door as in we went. Yet we had learned one very important lesson. We had been made to realize that as long as there would be men like the two we had met the night before, willing to give the whole of their lives and all of their brilliant minds towards an effort to make this planet fit for human habitation—we need not worry, for then it was merely a question of time and patience for the secret to reveal itself.

It might take a thousand years or ten thousand years, but that was of no concern to nature, with all eternity at its disposal. It was our own incessant quest for the Holy Grail that mattered. The rest was 'detail' as the French would have it. We had now come in close personal contact with two of the noblest knights who had led the search for a reasonable solution and we had been deeply impressed. It was not easy to think of other guests who could possibly come up to the standard that had been set on that ever-memorable evening when we played hosts to Plato and Confucius.

Frits confessed himself to be at a complete loss, and I too had no idea where to turn for even the vaguest kind of suggestion. I had just acquired the famous Blaeu Atlas, printed in Amsterdam during the middle of the seventeenth century and a joy for ever to anyone with a love for fine craftsmanship. The volume containing Europe was on my desk, and, opening it at random, I found myself gazing at a page showing the Baltic.

I had always had a great affection for the countries of northern Europe. I love the landscape of my native land, but I find myself much more at home among the people of Scandinavia. And before I die I hope to spend one more winter in Norway, one more spring in Denmark, one more summer in Stockholm, and one more autumn in Lapland, with a side trip to Finland if there still is a Finland after Russia has once more failed to find an outlet in the south and must content itself with one of the ice-free harbours of the north.

Maps are more apt to give me ideas than any other kind of intellectual stimulants—pictures, letters, or contemporary documents.

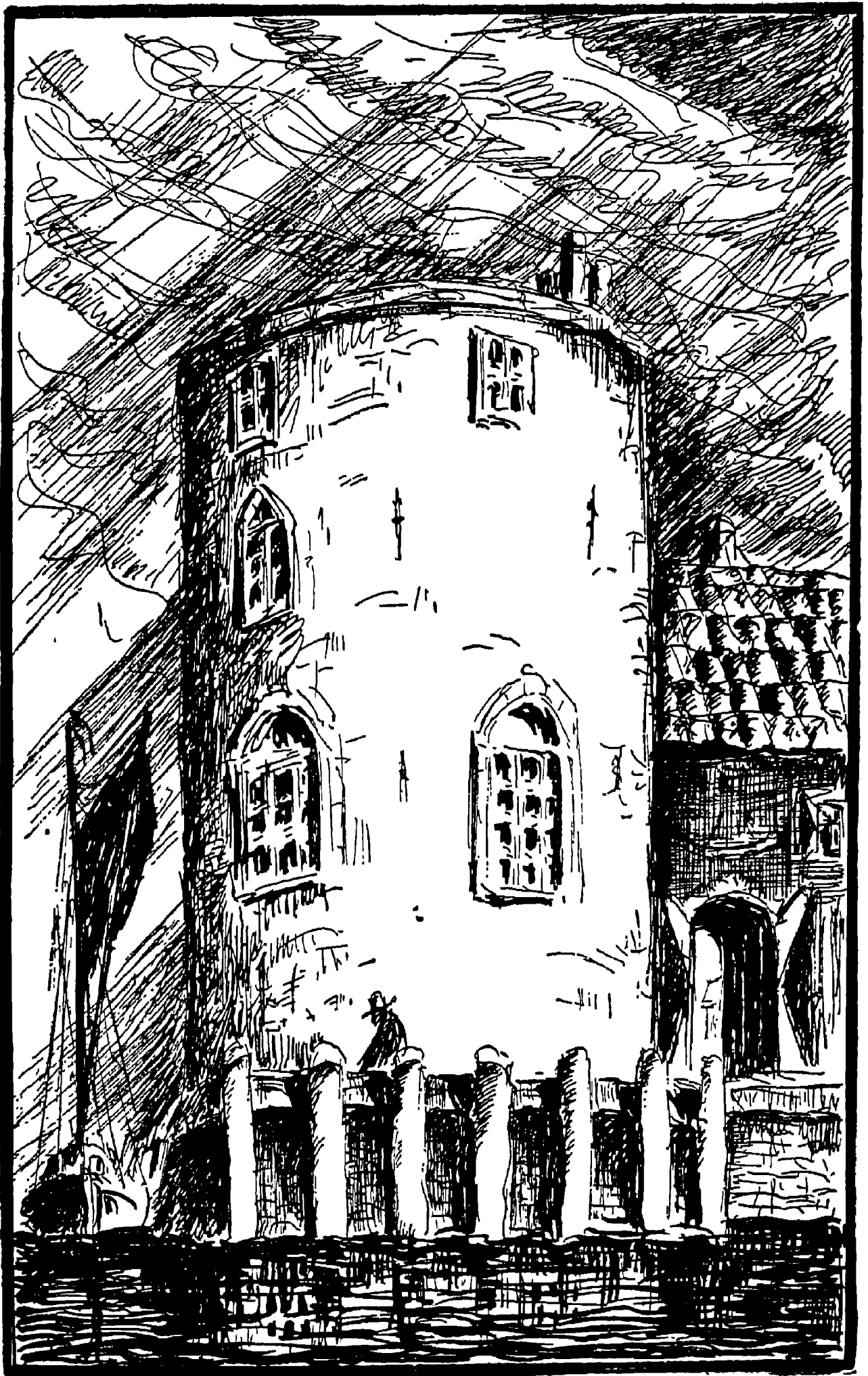
Charles could not even give himself time enough to get well after he had been wounded in battle, and as he was always in the midst of the fray, he stopped many a bullet during his nineteen years in the field. That is a long time to spend in the open, sleeping in tents or smoky peasant huts, but that is his record, and a very remarkable one it is, for Hannibal (who is his runner-up) returned home after only fifteen years in Italy, while Napoleon, although he was for ever at war with somebody during the twenty-two years of his active career, believed in short campaigns and hastened back to Paris as soon as he had defeated whoever had been on his list.

Our guests therefore would not be very particular about the food we placed before them, but we intended to do as well by them as we could, for both of them were unpredictable characters, accustomed to have everything their own way. That particular evening, of all the evenings of their lives, might prove to be the one they had expected to devote to the pleasures of the table, and heaven help us if then we should have been found wanting! They had been brought up in an atmosphere of 'yes-men' and they would let us know in unmistakable terms what they thought about our hospitality.

And so here was the menu upon which, by the way, we could spend all the money appropriated for this party, for we would not be under any necessity to buy new records. Neither of our guests, as far as we knew, had ever shown the slightest interest in music. Perhaps they had liked to listen occasionally to a little military music, but military bands, as we know them to-day, did not come into existence until the Napoleonic wars, and I would not have known where to get records of eighteenth-century bands that would have sounded like the bugle corps which had accompanied the armies of Peter and Charles. Peter, of course, must have been familiar with Russian church music, but he had never shown the slightest interest in that aspect of the services, which was entirely too cultural for his primitive tastes.

I decided not to waste any money on new records, but instead, I ordered something that is both rare and expensive in the Low Countries—a venison steak. We could get one by telegraphing to Amsterdam, and I asked Jo to follow our old recipe for *Rouelles de cerf à la Saint-Hubert*, which has the venison boiled in bouillon and red wine with a liberal admixture of prunes and laurel leaves, giving it a decided taste of *Hasenpfeffer*.

With this I asked our good cook to serve a purée of potatoes mixed with string beans, and I thought that brown beans with a heavy gravy would turn this into a stout masculine meal. I decided to dispense with the *smörgåsbord* as it is served to-day, realizing that, although usually associated with the kitchen of Sweden, it is a comparatively recent



ONE TOWER STILL GUARDED THE ENTRANCE TO OUR HARBOUR

and told them, "There are millions of us, but we do not know how to govern ourselves. Please come and do the job for us."

The Norsemen did not have to be told twice. Here was an unlimited chance of easy plunder. They hastened eastward and founded a regular Russian state and as the Ruriki—descendants of a mythical Rurik, a Swedish chieftain who was said to have been the first to arrive on the scene—they administered Russia for almost seven hundred years. Then they died out (seven centuries is a long time for any dynasty to survive), and their place was taken by new rulers of undiluted Slavic origin. Perhaps there was a small admixture of Tartar blood in their veins from those days in the thirteenth century when Russia had been overrun and conquered by the little yellow men from the great plains that lay hidden behind the Ural mountains. But they felt themselves to be Russians and only Russians. The landlocked possessions of the grand dukes of Muscovy were no longer sufficient for their far-reaching ambitions. They must have outlets to the sea. In the north there was the eternal ice. In the south there were the Turks. There was only one exit left, by way of the Baltic. And here we connect with Piotr Aleksyeevich, better known to us as Peter the Great.

As his name indicates, Peter was the son of Tsar Alexius Mikhailovich, and therefore a member of the House of Romanov, which had got hold of the Muscovite throne in the year 1613. Alexius Mikhailovich had been married twice. Peter was the son of his second wife, Natalia Naryshkina. There was already a boy in the family, Ivan, but he was such a hopeless imbecile (and was, furthermore, suffering from an eye disease which had made him half blind) that even in the unsqueamish Russia of those days it was felt that he must never be allowed to exercise any kind of authority.

The elders of the state came together and appointed Peter to take his place. This led to an insurrection on the part of some of the troops who hoped to benefit by having an idiot on the throne. There was a compromise, and Ivan and Peter were recognized together.

As the boys were supposed to be too young to take a direct share in the government, their sister Sophia (in the case of Peter only a half-sister) was told to act as regent until her brothers should have reached their majority. This Sophia was a woman of considerable native ability, but she was very, very Russian in spirit, and the Russians of the seventeenth century were still living in a state of medieval ignorance, filth, and bliss. That would not have mattered so much if Moscow had still been a small Slavic nation. But after the fall of Constantinople, whatever was left of the cultural traditions of Byzantium, of the old Eastern Roman Empire, had been transferred to Moscow, and Moscow had thereupon become the centre of a civilization that did not have its counterpart in any other

through part of Russia. That is the only way you ever learn anything about history. Here, for example, is a discovery I give you for what it is worth. In spite of all we have been told to the contrary, Lenin and Stalin and all their disciples and assistants should not really be considered big bad Communists. They were, and are, merely so many Peters the Great dressed up in modern civilian clothes and with cloth caps instead of tri-cornered hats. They were, and are, left-wing tsars, and the people they rule over are not really modern Communists. They are exactly the same sorts of peasants and serfs as those who lived in the seventeenth century when all this began. The only difference is that to-day they work in factories instead of sweating behind the plough.

Here is young Peter as I see him. Had he lived to-day, he would have been the joy of our psychologists—an ideal case for the study of every sort of maladjustment. He had been a neglected child and during his early youth had lived in constant fear of his life. The Kremlin in which he was brought up resembled a Turkish seraglio rather than a respectable Christian palace. But from his mother he seems to have inherited a certain tendency towards 'modernism.' Although this lady had spent all her married life in the seclusion of a concubineless harem (the old Russians were strictly monogamous as far as their official wives were concerned), she had as a young girl obtained a little first-hand information about the outside world and she must have contaminated her small son with some of her own enthusiasms for the ways of the West. Otherwise it seems incomprehensible that a young Muscovite prince, brought up in a completely Byzantine atmosphere, should ever have become at least a 50 per cent. European. For the only other person with whom Peter came in direct daily contact during his life in the Kremlin was his half-sister Sophia, and she was more than willing to remain as Russian as she always had been, not as much by inclination perhaps as by good sound policy, for she was on top and intended to stay there.

Meanwhile, she had no objections if Peter in his spare time amused himself as best he liked, provided he kept away from all councils of state and did not in any way interfere with the way she and her advisers saw fit to rule the land.

To Peter this was a most satisfactory arrangement. Since he had no regular duties at the court, he could spend all his days wherever he felt most at home. That happened to be that part of Moscow reserved for the foreign element which had gradually found its way to the Russian capital. Like all such foreign settlements, whether in Moscow or Madras, it was filled with a weird and unsavoury assortment of human beings. Carl Zuckmayer, who gave us *The Captain of Köpenick* and *The Laughing Vineyard*, should write a play about them. Think of all the strange



see, but he did not come until much later. And the adventures which befell the great admiral show the sort of life these expatriated citizens lived, once they had ventured forth into the land of the Slavs. If (as we know from Jones' letters) existence was pretty bad and messy in the St. Petersburg of the eighteenth century, what must it have been in the Moscow of the seventeenth?

Yet that was the school which Piotr Aleksyeevich attended and where he got both his A.B. and his Ph.D., and that is where he learned to drink his gin and smoke his pipe. The first was no great sin in the eyes of the good Russians. According to legend, they had only decided in favour of Christianity over the much more practical Mohammedanism because the Prophet had been such a very strict advocate of teetotalism. But tobacco was anathema in the eyes of the Muscovite clerics. A pipe in a man's mouth filled their souls with almost as much horror as the sight of a beardless male face, for the Devil was clean-shaven whereas honest Christians wore beards that reached down to their knees. If this young prince was going to show himself in public "sucking tobacco," as smoking was then called, he might, should he ever come into full control of the Government, go as far as to advocate a beardless Russia.

Little did they know what awaited them! The pipe-smoking prince did come to the throne, and immediately afterwards his soldiers went through the streets of the capital and stopped every bearded boyar who came along. A quick twist of their sharp scissors—and the whiskers were gone. No use complaining, for if you were a little too loud in your protestations, it might be your head that went next.

Peter's accession to the throne, as I told you a moment ago, had been accompanied by a mutiny of the lifeguards, and this mutiny had been suppressed in the approved Russian fashion—the rebellious soldiers had been slaughtered like cattle. Then there had been seven years during which Sophia had been the head of the State and during which Piotr of the Russian Kremlin was changed into Peter of the European Suburb. But these seven years had been no waste of time. On his country estate (Sophia liked it just as well if her brother kept out of her sight) Peter was busy drilling the sons of his serfs and on a small lake he was 'playing navy' with a couple of rowing-boats transformed into miniature warships.

Thus came the day—the inevitable day—when the fanatic believers in the old Russia decided to rid themselves of that walking menace which was for ever talking about a 'new' Russia. They engaged in another conspiracy, but as usual they bungled the plot, and Peter had his opportunity. He was now seventeen years old and quite able to take care of himself. He ousted the regency. Half-sister Sophia was locked up in a

By the way, Peter returned much sooner than he had expected. He had to. The conservatives at home had seen the way the wind was blowing. Soon, they feared, the storm would become a regular hurricane, and once more there had been a mutiny on the part of the old palace guards, Peter, being informed of this new outbreak of rebellion, rode back to Moscow at breakneck speed, and the moment he had arrived in his capital there was another purge.

This time Peter did his job thoroughly. He himself assisted with the executions of his former soldiers. Only a few of the *streltsy* were left. And after their bodies had been thrown into the river, the work of reform began in all seriousness.

With his own hands Peter clipped the beards of his courtiers. Those who lamented too loudly were given an opportunity to retain their whiskers by paying a heavy ransom—so many thousands of roubles for every inch of hair. Then off with their long Oriental robes, while Hungarian tailors were busy making them their first suits of European clothes, consisting of practical short coats and pantaloons after the best Viennese patterns. And—a terrible shock to all believing Christians—from that time on, the year was supposed to begin on January first, as it did in the rest of the world, and not on September first, when, according to Russian chronology, God had created our planet.

All this sounds rather silly to us, but let us remember that, only a short time before, these same benighted Russians had destroyed a clock which had been erected in the Kremlin because the bell which struck the hours made them think of the voice of the devil. Also, they had burned down the first print shop in Moscow because books were suspected of being the cause of the spread of dangerous thoughts.

After these preliminary arrangements came the great struggle for a foothold in the north. Without the assistance of Europe, Russia was too weak to tackle the Turks, who held all the southern part of the great European plain. There was only one other way of escape, by means of the Baltic. That was the beginning of the twenty-year struggle with Sweden, the country which then, as now, held the key to the Baltic.

The first battle, that of Narva, ended in an ignominious defeat for the Russians, but Peter, who was just as obstinate as Charles, held on. He quickly reorganized his troops, ruined himself buying the latest cannon that were to be found on the European market, and in the battle of Poltava he annihilated the Swedes.

It was during the next twenty years, when at any moment the Russians might lose all they had thus far gained, that the new Russia came into existence. For now Peter realized that there was no other choice but to

essentially Russian character, never wanted to be called after himself, though to-day it is called Leningrad instead of St Petersburg.

Then the Tsar went ahead with his building programme in a big way. Forty thousand serfs from all over Russia were driven into this marshy region along the shores of the Neva to work on his far-flung projects. These poor creatures died like flies. Malaria, cholera, typhus—all of them were present. Often only half of the poor slaves were well enough to do anything at all. But the job had to be done. In the year 1712 the Tsar could move into his first residence, the so-called Summer Palace. A few years later he also had his Winter Palace on the spot where the famous picture-gallery of the Hermitage stands to-day. In 1724 the remains of St Alexander Nevsky, the great Russian hero of the wars against the Tartars, were reverently removed from Moscow to the new capital, and in the year in which Peter died, 1725, his city already counted more than seventy-five thousand inhabitants.

The Tsar's immediate successors did their best to turn the tide and tried very hard to re-establish Moscow as the national capital. But it could not be done. The tide insisted on running in the opposite direction. St Petersburg continued to grow and increase just as long as Russia was trying to be a European Power. It took the Bolsheviki, with their profound understanding of the true Russian character, to undo what the Romanovs had done and to go back to Moscow. Since then, Peter's "window on the west" has lost all its imperial glamour. It has, in spite of its vast number of inhabitants, become a provincial town where the grass grows in the streets and where the empty windows of deserted palaces look down in deep despair upon the deserted avenues of what had been the dream of empire-minded Peter.

Peter died on February 7 (January 28 of our calendar) of the year 1725. As happened almost every year, the Neva had passed beyond its banks and had flooded the city. The Tsar was in a boat, doing his best to save people who had fled to the roofs of their houses. One of his sailors fell overboard. The Tsar jumped after him. He saved the man but caught a cold. The cold developed into pneumonia, and the alcohol-soaked body of the Emperor could offer but little resistance. He died ten days later, amid the grateful prayers of his subjects.

From a backward, medieval country Peter had turned Russia into a powerful modern nation. One often hears this question asked: would it not have been better if he had left well enough alone and had not wasted his energies upon so hopeless a task? But when he died the deed had been done, and it had been the work of one single man. Wherefore I think that I should now put him under my historical microscope, which is a curious instrument that works by the reflected light of several

on the part of his subordinates. If one of his subjects considered himself unfairly treated by an imperial official (be he corporal or Minister of State) he could always place his evidence before the Emperor, whose door was wide open, both day and night, to those who wished to approach him on such serious matters. If the petitioner was found to be right, the offending official would be hanged. Did the petitioner fail to prove his point, he himself would suffer a similar fate, for it was up to God's anointed to see that justice be done.

At the same time this inspired mystic could be guilty of crimes against human decency which make us see him in the light of another Genghis Khan. Like so many Russians (even in our own days), he seems to have been born without nerves. The aspect of human misery never disturbed him in his slumbers, and whether a hundred or a hundred thousand people died building his capital was a matter of no consequence to the man who had drawn up the blueprints.

That lack of any kind of moral equilibrium becomes very evident in the way he treated his peasants. As I just said, he would come down with the full force of his heavy boots upon any landowner who had been unduly cruel to one of his serfs. But that his exaggerated demands for revenue were causing these landowners to work their peasants like dray-horses and to keep them going day and night by means of the knout—well, that was something else again and something which never seems to have struck him as somewhat irrational.

It will always be very difficult for a Dutchman or an American to understand a Russian or to be entirely fair to him. There are too many absolutely contradictory elements in the Slavic make-up to give us western Europeans something definite of which we can catch hold. In Peter's case, however, there was one outstanding characteristic we are able to follow throughout his whole career. He worked in superlatives. He did not believe in compromises. There must be no pulling of punches. When Peter cheated, he cheated with all his heart and soul. When he lied, ditto. When he decided to tell the truth, as he did upon a few occasions, one could take him at his word. When he prayed, he meant every word he said, but this would not prevent him, the next moment, from having an entire regiment of rebellious soldiers knouted to death. And when he went empire-building or city-building or palace-building, his empire or his city or his palace must be constructed on a planetary scale—streets three hundred feet wide, market-places ten times as large as the Roman Forum, gaols for a thousand tenants at a time.

And when, after a short debauch in holiness, Peter decided to go in for the other extreme and wallow for a while in filth and dirt and muck, he then dived right in and with such abandon that he made old Henry VIII

Cousin Christina, who had left everything in a hopeless state of confusion (among other little details, she had given away half of the crown domains to her personal friends), had been succeeded by Charles XI. He was only four years old and had therefore been placed under the regency of a council composed of those great nobles who, having helped Gustavus Adolphus make Sweden great, now felt that they were entitled to do a bit of plundering of their own. They were highly successful but not for very long, for when the young King reached the age of twenty he got rid of the whole pack of them and did the only practical thing that could be done if the nation was to be saved from complete ruin—he made himself dictator. Therefore, when Charles XII was born, on June 17, 1682, Sweden was once more on the road to solvency, once more had an efficient army, and was again regarded by the rest of the world as the dominant factor in northern European politics. But of democracy in our sense of the word there was not a vestige, and nobody cared.

The mother of little Charles, Ulrica Leonora, was a princess of Denmark. She therefore came from the country with which the Swedes had fought the bitterest of their wars during the last four hundred years. But the royal union had made Denmark an ally and, as a result, the whole of the Baltic was now in Swedish hands. Russia, of course, always lay in the distance, but it was not considered a serious menace. It was too poor and too badly organized to be of any particular consequence.

As for the young Crown Prince, he was everything a country could have found in its ruler during a crisis. From his father he had inherited a strong love for horses and fast riding, a sport which stood him in good stead later in life when he rode from the Black Sea to the Baltic, straight across Europe, before anyone had even heard of his escape. As soon as he had been able to hold himself in the saddle (he acquired this difficult balancing feat at the age of four), he had accompanied his father the King on all his tours of inspection. He therefore had a first-hand knowledge of all the details of government, such as army posts, dockyards, harbours, stud farms, factories, and storehouses for grain and gunpowder, and he knew about all these things at an age when most children still identify foreign countries with the pictures on their postage stamps.

But Papa, who was a man of strong prejudices and tastes and as conscientious in his duties as any Prussian king of the seventeenth century, had also given his offspring three other avocations. Those were a love for bear-hunting, a thorough dislike of everything French, and a profound distrust of anything connected with the art of diplomacy.

Therefore, when Charles XI died (only forty-two years old), it seemed quite natural that this boy of fifteen should succeed him right away, and Charles was promptly elevated to the throne. Already at his coronation

must first of all punish Augustus of Saxony for his treason of the year before. His political advisers and all of his generals begged him to follow up his first success with an immediate attack upon the remnants of Peter's forces. The self-willed young man turned his back upon his Ministers and his staff and started on a wild-goose chase after Augustus. Peter, so he said, could wait, for by now the young King was suffering from a victory complex—that unfortunate Narva complex which still affects so many of his modern fellow-countrymen. He felt convinced that he could always and in all circumstances beat the Russians, no matter how great the odds, and that is where he was mistaken. For though the Muscovites were still barbarians and individually could not at all compare with the excellently disciplined Swedish privates, commanded by highly trained officers, Charles did not in the least understand the character of his Slavic opponents and he had sadly underrated their power of recuperation.

In consequence whereof, Charles wasted precious years marching up and down the dreary wastes of Poland, and when at last he turned once more against the Russians it was too late. Peter had used this interval of seven years to reorganize his army and waited for Charles near Poltava. A few days before the battle took place Charles had been wounded during a reconnaissance. Instead of taking to his bed, as his surgeons had told him, he had a chair rigged up between two horses so that he could take part in the fighting. He seems to have forgotten that a disabled commander with an exhausted and hungry army is not in an ideal position to gain any kind of victory, especially when his opponent has destroyed everything within his path so that there is nothing for either his men or his horses to eat.

At Poltava Charles tried to repeat the method that had been so successful at Narva, but this time luck was against him. The Cossack reinforcements upon whom he had set such great hopes failed to materialize. Instead of bringing him a hundred thousand cavalymen as Mazeppa, the Cossack chieftain from southern Russia, had promised, he brought only one thousand, and the reinforcements that had been expected from Sweden had been annihilated by a fourfold force of Russian troops.

Then General Winter appeared upon the scene. The winter of 1708-9 was the worst northern Europe had ever known. Birds, so the old chroniclers relate, were killed by the frost while flying through the air. It was impossible to light fires, for the wood would not ignite in the open. Even the wine froze in its flasks. But Charles, although his army had suffered terrific losses, doggedly stuck to his original plan of a direct attack. The memory of Narva dominated his mind, and as soon as summer had come and the roads were passable again, he hastened to repeat his former success.

remained only a few days, he now carried the war into Norway, which, being then under Danish domination, gave him an opportunity to attack Denmark.

Sweden, exhausted as few countries have ever been, its man-power gone, its money spent, its trade ruined, its credit destroyed, had somehow remained loyal. In December of the year 1718 Charles laid siege to the strong Norwegian fortress of Fredriksten. His foremost trench was only eight hundred feet from the walls of the citadel, and Charles (need I tell?) was in the foremost part of this trench. He arose from behind the earthen wall to get a better view of the situation. The next moment he lay dead with a bullet through his brain.

I doubt very much whether we shall ever find out who fired that fatal shot. Almost at once there were ugly rumours that one of his own soldiers had killed the King, so that peace might return to poor, lacerated Sweden. But others who had been on the spot and who had examined his Majesty's body after it had been carried to his tent swore that the bullet had entered the skull from the front and therefore must have been fired by an enemy. To-day, of course, the incident has value only as an antiquarian puzzle. The important fact was this—Charles no longer lived, and the Swedes were given a short breathing-spell. God knows, they needed it. Within less than twenty years this young man had been able to undo a century of laborious efforts on the part of his ancestors. The dream of empire had been gambled away, and Sweden had been reduced to the rank of a third-rate Power, while Russia arose as the dominant factor in northern Europe.

So much for the concrete results of Charles's endless errors.

Yet I can well understand the honour and esteem and affection in which this dashing knight is still held by most Swedes. They lead rather dull and unexciting lives, and Charles adds an element of glamour to their otherwise drab existence, a bit of colour which they seem to need almost as much as an occasional glimpse of the warm sun of Italy. Charles, as they will confess, was perhaps a good deal of a fool, but what a magnificent and glorious fool he had been! As a leader of men he was unsurpassed in the loyalty he evoked in those who followed him. Men would stand guard over his tent until they were frozen and they would die without a murmur, as long as they knew that their King was safe. Parents whose sons had disappeared in some Siberian prison-camp blessed his name. There were bitter complaints about the sad state of the nation—the general poverty, the loss of territory—but for all these the King's advisers were held to blame while his own memory remained unsullied.

For Charles had been possessed of one quality which the world has always held in such high esteem that it is willing to forgive all sorts of

does he wear underneath that robe or cassock, or whatever it is called? As a child, when I saw a picture of the Pope, I always wanted to know what he wore underneath his long white garments—long trousers or short trousers or just a pair of running trunks or nothing at all? I suppose those were not nice thoughts for a little girl whose father was a general in our respectable Dutch Army, but I remember that I always was curious, and I once even asked our dominie, but he was very much shocked and he answered me that he did not know and did not want to know. It was bad enough for some one who was supposed to be a Christian to wear a golden crown and silken garments without going any further. I told him I knew all about the golden crown and the silken garments on the outside, and they were undoubtedly very wicked, but how about the Pope's trousers? I must have been four or five at the most when I started on this line of investigation, but it caused quite a scandal, the general's daughter asking the minister about the Pope's trousers. And even to-day I don't know, though I have spent a lot of time in Rome, for those things are hard to find out, and how am I going to decide the size of a sweater for Erasmus?"

Frits told her he would fix it, and the next time we called on the old gentleman I got very much interested in the Greek manuscript he was examining and meanwhile Frits slipped behind his chair and, using his handkerchief as a tape measure, got the approximate proportions according to which Lucie would have to do her knitting. She was now busy with her wool—a brilliant red wool—a mixture between vermilion and carmine—especially ordered from Paris.

"That will make him feel like a cardinal," Lucie explained, "and of course the colour does not matter, for no one will ever see him wear it."

She still needed several weeks to finish her sweater, and that fitted in beautifully with our plans, for then Sint Nikolaas would come round, and we had some very special plans for that day. It would be very difficult to find a suitable present for our learned old friend. A sweater would be just the thing.

But to return to a moment ago—there we were, the three of us, with Erasmus in his beloved chair by the corner of the fire, exchanging pleasant remarks with Jo, who had come to understand his old-fashioned Dutch quite well and could now give as good as she got, for the Dutch are no prudes, and they would have made marvellous officials at the court of Queen Bess.

Then Jo said she must go to her own home and start the vegetables.

"I have to apologize for something I have done," Erasmus began. Frits said that there was nothing in this world which he could think of





VOLTAIRE WAS MERELY A BRAIN ON STICKS

even have stolen it from him, but I decided not to go into the matter any further (at that moment at least), for I noticed that the old Frenchman was looking at me very intently. Having examined me carefully from head to foot, he finally spoke.

"Monsieur," he said, "this is the first time I have the pleasure of meeting you in the flesh."

"And a lot of it," Frits volunteered.

"Oh, well," Voltaire told him, "that is the way he was born. Now take me. I have eaten five meals a day every day of my long life. And not an ounce of fat could I put on. I have drunk twenty cups of coffee every day and I have slept like a log every night. It all depends how one is born. But to continue what I was just about to say, I know all about you, my dear sir."

"You don't mean to tell me," I said, "that you have read my books where you are now?"

"Alas, no. They would not last long in that rarefied atmosphere. But these last few years we have been made happy by the arrival of a great many Americans. A marvellous people, and I am glad they have done so well since my day."

"And they told you about me? That hardly seems possible."

"No, they did not. At least, not directly. But they have caused many improvements to be introduced. At least, that is what they call them, though I think the word is open to debate."

"What have those 'improvements' got to do with me?"

"Well, I do not want to divulge any secrets. It is this way. Every so many years we come up for a re-examination of our merits. One of your Americans is now in charge of a large new department—it covers about five thousand blocks in heaven and is entirely filled with tin boxes. In those boxes there are sheets of cardboard. On these cards stand revealed what posterity is saying about us."

"Good Lord!" Frits interrupted. "What a hopeless job!"

"Well, you see, we have all the trained help we need. There were always millions of people who loved just that kind of mechanical labour, and as they were too busy to do any harm they went to heaven. But knowing whom I was to have the honour of meeting this evening, I went through my own dossier. At first I could not find it. They are very systematic, your Americans. They had classified me under my original name. And I had to move all the way from the *V* to the *A*—you will remember Arouet. One of the attendants kindly helped me out, for it was a terrible distance—about a day's walk. I then discovered that in your books you have mentioned my name a great many times!"

"Ah," said Erasmus, "that gives me an idea. The next time I am in

"Rest assured," Charles answered him, "I don't. Besides, I don't like the French."

"Your Majesty, it is our loss."

"It is," said Charles, who never seemed to waste any unnecessary words.

While this passage at arms was going on, Peter had walked to the corner of the room, where he paused before Frits' radio.

"*Wat is?*" he asked, in something that was meant to be Dutch.

"A machine to catch the sounds that fly through the air," I answered, in something that was meant to be Russian.

"You speak our language?"

"Hardly, your Majesty. I picked it up—just a very little."

"Where?"

"In the city your Majesty founded."

"Ah, you have been there? Tell me all about it, but first show me how this thing works. I love machinery of every kind."

I turned the radio on. We got London, and some one was teaching children how to speak Italian. "That seems silly," said Peter. "Why don't they teach them how to handle arms? But the invention is interesting. Open the box. I want to see what is inside."

"I am sorry, your Majesty, but that box is locked, and we have lost the key."

"Oh, that is easily fixed," and pulling his sword out of its scabbard he prised the lid open. Then he put his hand inside and burned his fingers on one of the valves.

"*Godverdom!*" he swore beautifully in Dutch, "why didn't you warn me?"

"I didn't have time, your Majesty."

"A feeble excuse! Now tell me how it works."

Being completely devoid of any mechanical sense, I had to confess that I didn't know.

"That is the trouble with you clever people who write books. You have no practical sense. You would have been completely useless to me, but never mind—I will find out for myself," and suiting the action to the word he pulled out a coil of wire, with the result that the radio stopped, damaged beyond repair.

This, however, did not seem to bother Peter the least little bit. For he walked unconcernedly to the table, picked up our bottle of vodka, took out the cork, said, "Wonderful! After all these many years!" and poured half of its contents down his throat. Frits tried to save the situation by asking Charles, who all this time had been sitting in stony silence, whether perhaps he would care for a glass of aquavit.

"*Nej.*" said his Majesty of Sweden, "I am not a drunkard."

was Jimmie, who told me that Horace Liveright had tried to reach me from New York but would call again the next morning.

"Where is New York?" Peter asked.

"In America, your Majesty."

"And where is America?"

"At the other side of the ocean, your Majesty."

"I don't believe it," said Peter. "I must look at this contraption for myself. Could you use that 'thing' to talk to my town as well?"

"We could, your Majesty."

"Then do it."

"We don't know anybody to call up there, your Majesty."

"Call up the Tsar. Tell him I want to talk to him. I, Piotr Aleksyeevich."

"There is no longer a tsar in Russia, your Majesty."

"You are a liar. There always will be a tsar in Russia. Here, let me have that thing. I will try it out myself." And hastily swallowing the rest of his vodka, Peter got up and went to the telephone, Frits following him with an expression of despair on his face.

As soon as he had left us, Charles suddenly unbent. "Gentlemen," he said, "I must apologize. You must think me a very ill-bred person. I do not, I assure you, intend to repay you for your very generous hospitality by this act of boorishness. But this Russian person—this brute—this savage—has always affected me this way. Even now he gets on my nerves. But let us use this moment's welcome respite to talk of pleasanter things and allow the King of Sweden to drink your very good health," and lifting his glass of wine (he had discovered that Erasmus and Voltaire were having *Liebfraumilch*), he hailed us in a most elegant Swedish fashion, a very singular honour, for it is not often that royalty takes the initiative in such matters. After this ceremony he begged my pardon for having spoken so curtly to me.

"I have such an intense dislike for this creature over there," he said, pointing to Peter in the corner, who just then was arguing violently with some one in the Amsterdam central office and insisting that he be given the Imperial Palace in St Petersburg, "that it freezes my blood to have to be in the same room with him. But tell me all about Stockholm. I hardly knew the city. I left it when I was quite young and only saw it for a few days after I returned. Has the royal palace been rebuilt and on the same spot?"

I took a pad of paper and quickly sketched those parts of the loveliest of all cities I remembered best. Parts of my pictures he recognized, and he became the most charming of companions, full of that quiet courtesy for which all his companions had praised him during those many and exceedingly trying years he had passed in semi-captivity in Turkey.

At that moment, Peter returned from his telephonic investigations. He



PETER THE GREAT, IN A DRUNKEN STUPOR, FELL DOWN ON THE TABLE

kind of people who rule the world. And for such people, hundreds of thousands of humble subjects are supposed to give their lives! For such people, whole countries are devastated!"

Erasmus agreed with him. "I should bring out a new edition of my *Praise of Folly*," he told us. "This evening, I have learned a great many new things."

But we still had an hour to spare, and during that hour, Frits and I sat and listened to the brightest and the wittiest and sometimes the wisest conversation we had ever heard or ever expected to hear. With the result that after Voltaire and Erasmus were gone, we remained in our chairs in front of our little open fire and continued to talk for at least two hours, when at last I took my leave and made for home.

It was a dark and stormy night. Wild clouds were racing past a watery moon. I decided to take a short walk, for I felt badly in need of a little fresh air. My road led past the old church, and from there, after crossing the bridge, I found myself among the open fields. By the light of the moon I noticed two figures in a near-by pasture. They had shed their capes and hats, but I recognized them at once. They were engaged in a fast and furious battle of swords. I felt that it was my duty to intervene, but just when I was on the point of making my presence known, the smaller one of the two ran his rapier through the chest of his opponent. The wounded man bellowed like a stricken ox, but only once. Then he fell forward on his face with such violence that the sword of his enemy snapped and broke, the upper part remaining stuck in his chest.

I decided that I had better go home. If there was to be an inquest, I might be called upon as a witness and I did not want to be mixed up in a case of this sort.

But there never was any inquest. I met our policeman the next morning, and after we had commented upon the weather and had told each other that autumn was almost over and now it soon would be winter, I asked him whether everything was quiet in the village.

"Never knew it to be so peaceful," he told me. "Not since after that evening when you had those two drunken organ-grinders at Mynheer Frits' house. You remember those wild-looking men who started a fight and hit each other over the head with the wine bottles? And whom I had to put into the clink? Since that evening nothing at all has happened in our town."

"That's fine," I said, "for that is why we live here. Because nothing ever happens in our little city."

Then I offered him one of my best American cigars, which I carried especially for such occasions, and he, after some urging, took two, and we each went our way, happy that we were allowed to live in a village where nothing ever happened.



TWO SHADOWY FIGURES WERE DUELLING IN THE MOONLIGHT

be a novelty for our guests, as neither Dante nor Leonardo could ever have tasted a tomato. The love-apple had been brought to Europe by the early Spanish explorers, but it had been grown only for ornamental purposes until the end of the eighteenth century, being until then considered poisonous and therefore unfit for human consumption. But I decided to take a chance with this pleasant fruit, and Jo was given the recipe for *noisettes de mouton aux tomates* and told not to forget that her slices of tomato must be served with an anchovy rolled on top of each one.

As the people of the Middle Ages (and of the Renaissance too, for that matter) had never been very great vegetable-eaters, I thought that Dutch carrots with a plentiful garnishing of parsley would do as well as any other vegetable. Potatoes? Our guests would most probably not care for them, and I thought it safer to order stewed corn. This we imported from America in cans, as the Dutch corn never grows tall enough to be eaten by human beings and is only used to feed the cattle.

For dessert we could have the famous *flamiches* of the sixteenth century, which were a kind of cheese cake. In case our guests did not like these, we would have all sorts of real cheese, for was there ever an Italian who did not take to cheese as a Scotsman takes to haggis?

The wine problem was easily settled. Any kind of 'red ink'—any kind of that cheap Chianti which is about the best known of all Italian articles of export—would be satisfactory. A better wine would be a waste of money and effort, for our guests would not notice the difference, being in that respect undoubtedly quite as untrained as the average modern American.

The music had to be chosen carefully, for both our guests were very much interested in this subject. Of Leonardo we knew that he had been a first-rate lute-player and had made all sorts of experiments with those instrumental combinations which were so popular during the beginning of the Renaissance. As for Dante, he himself had told about his love for sweet melodies when he described how in Purgatory he had come across Pietro Casella, a famous madrigal writer of the thirteenth century who had been one of his favourite composers.

As there is, however, very little music of that era that has come down to us, and none of it by Casella, I decided to start out with one of the records of Guillaume Dufay which we had played with so much success the night Sir Thomas More called on Erasmus. It was his *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. In addition to this, I sent for Guillaume de Machaut's Credo and Sanctus from the Mass he had composed for the coronation of Charles V of France in the year 1364. The rest would be more specially for Leonardo, and for him I chose Jacopo Peri's *Gioite al canto mio* from his opera *Euridice* and Claudio Monteverdi's *Lasciatemi morire* and two



and had originally been Aldiger or something like that. Dante himself seems to have been unaware of any Germanic antecedents. Indeed, he confessed that he was almost completely ignorant about his own ancestry. While on his famous visit to the nether regions, he stumbled upon one of his great-great-grandfathers who bore the romantic name of Cacciaguida, or something like that. The particular crime or misdemeanour for which this stout warrior and crusader was roasting in hell I do not remember, but there he was, and he and his descendant had quite a pleasant little chat. But it is perfectly possible that Dante, being a poet rather than a historian, had deliberately invented this distinguished progenitor, just as I in my *Rembrandt* gave life to the good Dr Ioannes van Loon, who has since then been honoured with a special item in the *General German Pharmaceutical Encyclopedia*, although he never existed except in my own brain.

And then there is one other point I want to make right away, so that we do not get things mixed up. Dante did not write his *Inferno* for the purpose of adding to our historical knowledge of the fourteenth century. He wanted to give expression to his private opinion of many of the people with whom he had come in contact during his own political career, and his literary masterpiece was his way of getting even with those of his neighbours who had not quite treated him as he thought he had deserved.

The comedy he bestowed upon us is usually known as the "Divine." It was divine from a literary point of view, for few books have been written with so much venom and so much hatred and such profound desire for vengeance as this immortal opus of the gloomy Florentine.

We know very little about Dante's father except that he had married twice and had several other children, but most of them remained obscure and hazy figures who played no particular rôle in Dante's own life. We have, however, sufficient information about Dante's background to be certain that while he did not belong to the nobility, he was of good family and that his father and his grandfather before him had been men of sound standing in the community, both socially and economically. But when it comes to details about his childhood and the days of his youth, we are again in the dark. His father could afford to give him the best education then available for a commoner and did so. Therefore, the future Columbus of hell was no self-made man within the realm of letters, as has sometimes been claimed. He had learned all that could be learned in a medieval city of the last half of the thirteenth century (he was born in the year 1265), and he was thoroughly familiar with the classics.

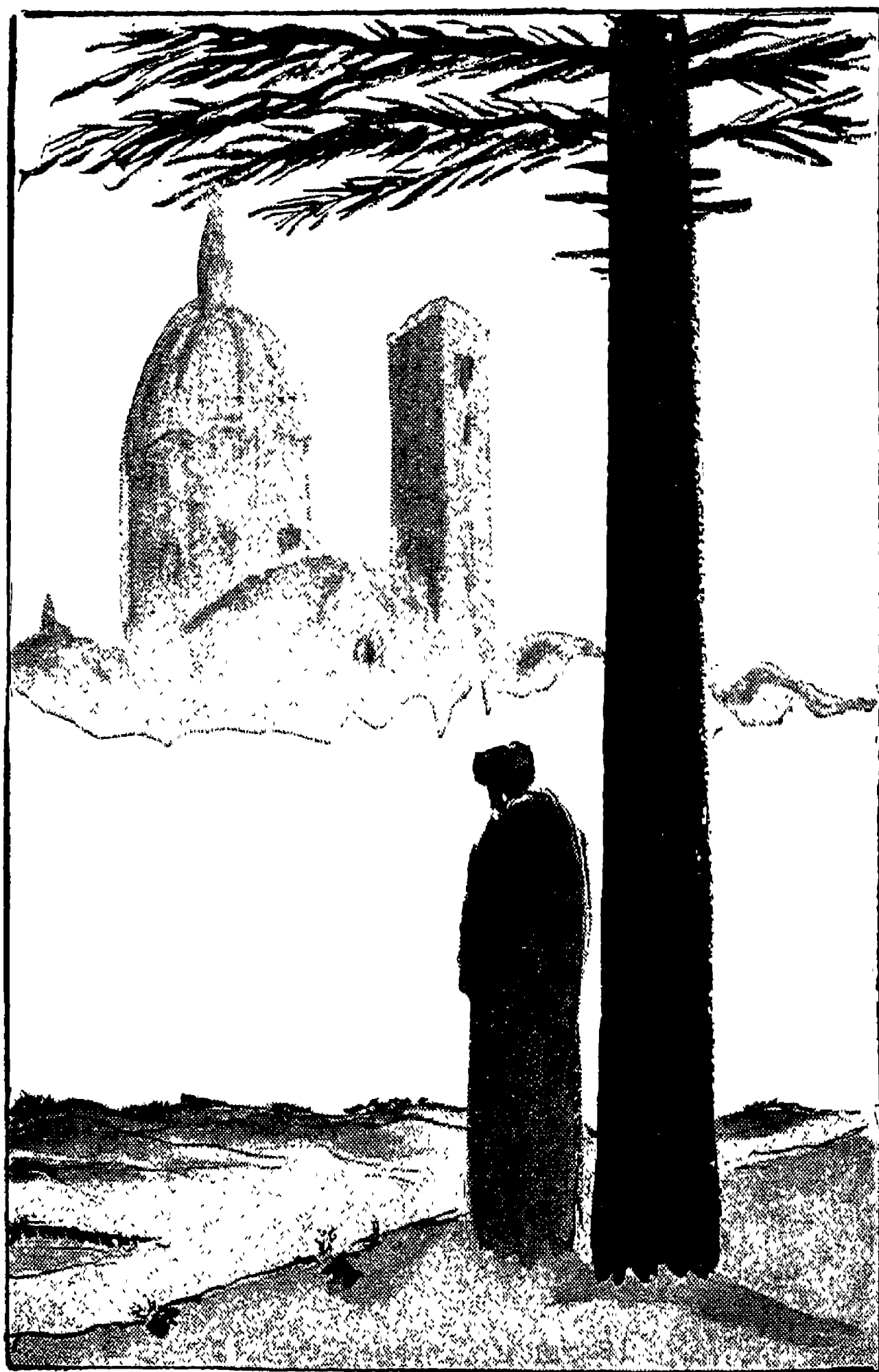
The only other incident about this period which has come down to

sentiments, while the country squires were of the Ghibelline persuasion. In Florence, a stronghold of commerce and manufacturing, the Guelphs had been driven out of power a short time before Dante was born. The feeling, however, between the two parties had been much too strong to have entirely disappeared, and the city, when Dante entered upon his political career, was divided into the so-called Black Guelphs and White Guelphs, or the Blacks and the Whites—as they were called for short. These Blacks and Whites fought each other very much as modern Republicans and Democrats will fight each other in America.

Dante, who from the age of thirty on had been a member of the Florentine city Government, happened to belong to the faction of the White Guelphs. Therefore, when still another and altogether unexpected local upheaval had brought the Black Guelphs back into power, he and all the leading members of his party were forced to leave the city on pain of being executed if they should ever again dare to set foot on Florentine territory. That meant that six hundred families were suddenly deprived of all their possessions and were cast upon the generosity of the world at large, without a penny to their name. To many of them it meant the end. Others of a tougher fibre settled down in some near-by White city and supported themselves by doing menial jobs or finding employment in one of the sweat-shops which were so characteristic of the Italy of that day. Still others became professional exiles and spent their time plotting for the overthrow of the Government in the old home town, while accepting money from anyone foolish enough to let them have it.

Dante was an exception. He must already have enjoyed a certain reputation as a man of letters, for he never lacked at least sufficient cash to pay for his daily needs. These were exceedingly simple. All the same, even a few dollars a week mean an awful lot to a political refugee, and those few dollars Dante always seems to have had at his disposal. And since he was now without any regular employment, he thought it would be a good idea if first of all he saw a little something more of the world than most of his fellow-Italians had ever bothered to do and learned a few things about his fellow-men.

First of all, he proceeded to Milan, where he paid homage to the newly elected emperor of that Holy Roman Empire of Germanic origin which had been founded by Charlemagne in the year 800. From Milan he wandered all over northern Italy. After that, having enjoyed the temporary hospitality of a great number of Italian princes who supported the Ghibelline or imperial cause, he moved to the little city of Ravenna, where he stayed for the rest of his days under the protection of the local dictator, Guido da Polenta. And there he worked on his great poem and there he died on the fourteenth day of September of the year of grace 1321.



THE EXILE

reconstruct practically the whole of the life of the Middle Ages out of this one volume.

Modern man can no longer hope to do this. Balzac in his *Comédie humaine* showed us the kind of people who lived in France during the first half of the last century. Zola tried to perform a similar service for those of the last half. But Dante surpassed them both. His field of operations was of course a much less complicated one than that of the two Frenchmen I just mentioned. He lived in an age of basic simplicities. Neither time nor distance had as yet been abolished, and God still ruled over heaven and earth as He had done since the beginning of time. Science was practically non-existent, and the arts dealt with rather crude materials, for musical instruments and all the modern methods of reproduction, such as oil paints and etching presses and indelible inks, were not to make their appearance until much later.

In order to move from one spot to another, one still walked. If the voyage was to be taken by sea, one sailed by God and by guess, without any very dependable assurance of ever reaching one's destination. Also, there still was a complete lack of even the most rudimentary forms of comfort. Therefore, the prince and the pauper enjoyed very much the same kind of daily existence. The prince might have a thousand horses at his disposal, but he could use only one at a time and therefore could not move much faster than the peasant who had only one mule, provided the mule felt inclined to take a little trip, in which case he might get there a great deal sooner than the royal or imperial stallion.

But even in those favourable circumstances, it remained a marvellous tour de force to reduce the whole of a civilization and a complete cycle of culture to one single volume and to turn that volume not into a dull encyclopedia but to make it a first-rate work of art full of life and colour.

Shortly after Dante's death the Renaissance, then so proudly compared with a rebirth of civilization, swept over Europe with the violence of an artistic hurricane. In the first proud flush of their victory, the men of the Renaissance looked down upon their immediate predecessors with the same contemptuous disdain with which they contemplated the architectural glories of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which they dismissed as too utterly Gothic, too hopelessly barbaric and crude, to be of any real interest to their own refined tastes.

Since then we have learned better. To-day most of us prefer the cathedral of Chartres to the church of St Peter's, and we have come to realize that the paper monument which Dante constructed out of the bitterness of his long and undeserved exile towers mightily above all the other creations of medieval man. I know it was not built out of mortar and stone. Paper and ink were the materials the great Florentine used

years during which the genius harvest in all parts of the world will be much greater than during other years or numbers of years. I dare not, however, be too dogmatic upon this subject, for quite often an otherwise barren part of the world will suddenly give us a most superior vintage, while other valleys which until then had provided us with the finest annual harvests will suddenly and for no apparent reason become as sterile as the central desert of the Australian continent.

Our specialists in the noble art of wine-growing seem to have some idea why there is apt to be such a great discrepancy between the harvest of one year and another. Unfortunately, the human race, unlike the humble grape, has never yet been subjected to that kind of clinical study, and as a result we know much less about it than we do about the product of our vineyards. Since the exceptional individual has mighty little chance to be made the subject of such an investigation in a world which has made the ordinary individual the centre of all his interest, there seems to be little chance of any immediate inquiry into the riddle of genius.

In the meantime and almost in spite of ourselves, we have got hold of a few data, but they only make the problem slightly more complicated. For example, it is easy to understand why a perpetually fertile region, like the valley of the Nile, should have been predestined to become one of the earliest centres of civilization. But why a rocky and barren peninsula like that of Greece should suddenly have risen forth as a beacon of such vast enlightenment that it still illuminates the whole of our cultural landscape remains an unsolved mystery, for there are a great many other rocky peninsulas in this world, and none of them have contributed a pennyworth to the sum-total of human progress.

Or let us take another example. Why should the flat meadows of the Low Countries have set an all-high standard for painting, while other flat countries like Denmark never attained anything much higher than pictorial mediocrity? I have no idea. And how about music? Imperial Vienna was undoubtedly a city suffering so severely from every kind of censorship that the available local energy had to find some other kind of outlet than by means of the forbidden politics. In such a case, music has always been an ideal means of escape. But why Vienna should have suddenly burst forth with a Gluck, a Haydn, a Mozart, a Beethoven, a Schubert, a Strauss, and all the others at the moment it did—that again is still a profound mystery. Other nations ruled over by the Habsburgs were repressed with equal brutality, but their musical output did not noticeably increase. Whenever I discuss this subject (a couple of times a day), I am told that the solution to the Viennese puzzle lies in the fact that the people of Vienna were a hodgepodge of all kinds of races and that such mixtures are invariably productive of great musical talent.

widespread and so eagerly pursued that it resembled our own search after promising baseball or football material. Let it be rumoured about that there was a budding painter or sculptor in some distant *villaggio* in Tuscany or Umbria, and the art scouts would go after him with the same eagerness with which to-day they would follow up a clue about a brilliant short-stop or half-back said to be playing in some bush league in Texas or Jersey.

Even social background, that bugaboo of medieval life, counted for nothing. Legitimacy was, of course, preferred, but illegitimacy was by no means a deterrent. It all came down to Schubert's happy phrase, "*Kann er was?*" or "Does the fellow know anything?" If he did—if he really knew something—he was welcome. Otherwise let him stay where he was and stick to his sheep or his pots and pans or double-entry book-keeping.

The Renaissance was by no means the last word upon the subject of human perfection. Far from it! The people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries remained as indifferent about science as those of the Middle Ages had been. They took no interest in those social problems which so seriously occupy us to-day that there is very little room left for anything else. They continued to live quite serenely in a world which stank in the most literal sense of the word. And being indifferent about even the most primitive kind of personal hygiene, those Renaissance ladies and gentlemen in their beautiful silks and satins tolerated a death-rate which makes us shudder when we think of that utterly unnecessary loss of life. But those good people, so far behind us in many things which we consider all-important, were far ahead of us in certain other respects to which we ourselves pay but scant attention.

During the Middle Ages religion had been an integral part of everybody's daily existence. The Church had supervised and regulated everything they did or thought from early morning until the moment it was time to go to bed. Now religion was gradually beginning to lose the hold it had had upon people's imagination, and the arts were taking its place, and after having turned their backs upon the world of the senses for almost ten full centuries, the men and women of the new Europe arose from their long and beautiful dream about the blessings of the life hereafter to discover that existence here on this planet could also be a most delightful experience. Being still possessed of that sense of wonder which had been so characteristic of the childlike folk who had preceded them, they took to their new toys with whoops of joy and made them as much part of their daily existence as their crucifixes and rosaries had been until only a few years before.

The Florentine and Milanese and Venetian and Paduan and Sienese contemporaries of Leonardo did not go to the theatre because the piece

endeavour, he did not merely dabble in paints and clays but boldly carried his researches into every field of the arts and the sciences.

We usually think of Leonardo as an old man with a generous crop of whiskers, for his self-portrait (in red chalk), which is the best-known one, shows him that way. When he was young, he must have looked quite different. All his biographers agree that he owed much of his initial success in life to his good looks, to the charm of his manners, and to the easy grace of behaviour which made it possible for him to meet every one, from queen to chambermaid, on the ground of a common understanding and appreciation.

Here again I could draw a rather interesting analogy between the sixteenth century and our own. To-day the artist, if he wants to pay his rent and to provide an occasional delicacy for his models, must appeal primarily to the women among his prospective customers. And since there are no longer any definite standards of taste (the last of the world-wide cultural patterns having disappeared when the rococo came to an end a hundred and fifty years ago), it is very easy for these modern patrons of the arts to insist that they must be right in their preferences because, while they may not know what is good, they know what they like, a remark which provoked Monet's famous reply, "Yes, madam, just like the cows."

Unfortunately, quite often they don't even really know what they like and they will hire a painter or a composer as they would hire a plumber, by sending for some one who is well recommended but about whose abilities they have no personal or first-hand information. In the case of the plumber they must, of course, practise a certain measure of caution, because a flooded cellar is a terrible nuisance. But a third-rate portrait can always be helped out by giving it the right kind of lighting or a very expensive frame or a fine write-up in the local newspapers. Since most of the admiring guests will be quite as ignorant upon the subject of good portraiture as their hostess, there is little chance that the true value of this wasted piece of canvas will be discovered, at least during the lifetime of the subject.

In Leonardo's day the men and not the women did the ordering, and therefore the artist was saved the degradation of having to go in for the social life of the community for no other purpose than to establish the right kinds of connexions. He probably was just as fond of a free meal as his descendants of to-day, but he did not have to mix his sales-talk with his liquor at a ladies' cocktail party.

In the case of Leonardo, this was all the more fortunate, for he was apparently not interested (or only very moderately so) in the feminine

half of the world. He spent most of his life among men, only occasionally painting their wives or using women as models for his Madonnas, but in spite of this they appreciated him sufficiently to keep him employed until the last day he spent on earth. To-day, I am afraid, he would have found it very difficult to make a living. Whereas, having been born in the fifteenth century, he died a fairly rich man, and he would have died a very rich man if his royal and princely customers had been a little more regular in the payment of their debts, and if he himself had not wasted so large a part of his income on his everlasting experiments, from submarines to flying-machines.

But let me get back to those facts so dearly beloved of all historians and a matter of such complete indifference to most artists. Here is his schedule between the years 1472, when he became a master painter in Florence, and 1519, when he died near Amboise, a small town not far from Paris.

In 1483 Lorenzo de' Medici, the ruler of Florence who not only loved art but (infinitely more important) *knew* it too, sent him as his special representative to Lodovico Sforza, better known as Lodovico il Moro, or Louis the Blackamoor, who at that moment happened to be the political boss of Milan. The purpose of this mission was the gaining of the Moro's good will. Leonardo succeeded so well in making himself popular that, when the time came for him to go back to Florence, the Milanese dictator kept him at his own court for most of the next sixteen years.

During this period Leonardo started a few pictures that were finished, but a great many more, like his famous *Last Supper*, remained for ever in the experimental stage. The rest of his time he worked on the cathedral of Milan, superintended the renovation of the Duke's castle, and drew up the plans for the irrigation of the plains of Lombardy and the digging of the Maremma canal. In his spare hours, he also arranged Il Moro's world-famous pageants, wrote the masques and fables that were given at these parties, and for good measure composed most of the music which was an inevitable part of such mummeries.

Also—I almost forgot—he laid out the plans for the fortifications of the city, finished a treatise on painting, and prepared to enrich Milan with a colossal equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza that was to be twenty-six feet high. This statue, I regret to say, was never finished. The original model was destroyed by some playful soldiers, who, being temporarily in control of the town, used it as a mark for their target practice.

In addition to these trifles, Leonardo also found time to continue his studies of human anatomy, to observe the flight of the birds, to construct



a flying-machine (which would have flown if he had had some kind of motor), to draw up the plans for a new seat of the municipal government, to collect groups of drunken old crones that he might observe their physiognomies while they were in their cups, to deliver lectures on art in the market-place, to show the gilded youth of Milan how one should ride a horse and take a hurdle, to study mathematics with Toscanelli (whose map of the world was used by Columbus during his first voyage across the ocean), to play the lute and write music for this exceedingly complicated instrument, and to act as consulting architect and engineer for those of the near-by political bosses who were on sufficiently friendly terms with Il Moro to borrow his 'man-of-all-work' whenever they were planning to do a little fortifying or irrigating of their own.

One of the most famous of these so-called 'intervals' when Leonardo was not kept busy at the court of Milan occurred in the year 1502, when Cesare Borgia sent for him to help him solve several big engineering projects in central Italy. One would suppose that, being buried up to his neck in blueprints, Leonardo just then would not have had time for anything else, but it was during the next year—1503—that he began that portrait of the wife of Zanobi del Giocondo, the lady with the mysterious smile who has been familiar to everybody these last four hundred years under the name of *La Gioconda*, or the *Mona Lisa*.

Finally, Leonardo found himself so flooded with orders for all sorts of things, that he was obliged to maintain two fully equipped studios, one in Florence and one in Milan, and to these he afterwards added still another one in Rome, where his old protectors, the Medici, now occupied the Holy See.

In this way, working and experimenting all the hours of both day and night, he had attained the age of more than sixty at a time when the average expectancy of life was less than forty. Being endowed with an indestructible constitution, Leonardo still enjoyed the best of health, but a new generation had grown up, and younger men like Michelangelo and Raphael were beginning to take the place he had held until then. He wisely decided that the time had come to retire. Painting and music no longer interested him as much as they used to. He was beginning to become more and more engrossed in his scientific studies. Therefore, when King Francis I of France offered him a quiet position at his own court, where he would be able to do exactly as he pleased, he gratefully accepted. It was just what he wanted to round off his life with dignity.

Francis was as good as his word and, being young and ambitious, he felt that the acquisition of an artist of Leonardo's fame was the greatest achievement of his life. He gave orders that the entire castle of Cloux, near Amboise, be placed at the master's disposal and earmarked sufficient

I should, of course, have thought of it, but somehow it had slipped my mind and it therefore came to me with quite a shock a few minutes before seven on Saturday night, when I was unexpectedly reminded that we should have prepared for an extra guest. I was on my way to Frits' house. I had as usual been working at my *Rembrandt* since early morning, and I took the long way round while going to the market-place, and this led me to the neighbourhood of the road to Middelburg, and there I suddenly beheld a strange procession.

Signor Dante, with stately steps, was approaching the good city of Veere. But he was not alone. As I should have anticipated (if I had been just a little brighter) he was accompanied by that faithful guide who had conducted him on his voyage through the nether regions. Immediately behind him there walked a creature that looked like a hog and which carried some kind of monster on its back. How stupid that I should have forgotten about Virgil until I actually saw him. Fortunately, there still was plenty of time to rearrange the seats at our table. I ran back home, grabbed my bicycle (which, like a cowboy's horse, was always waiting for the good people of Veere in front of their houses), and a few minutes later Jo had been given the necessary instructions, and three cups of water had been added to the soup.

That was the first of our adventures on this strange evening, and there were to be several others.

Immediately after the last war Veere had for a short time been a station of the Dutch flying corps. Being situated on the Scheldt, it was an ideal spot for seaplanes. But war departments are fickle institutions, and no sooner had the necessary docks and hangars been finished than all the plans had been changed and the fliers had been removed to another part of the country. But once in a while, when the navy held its annual manœuvres near Flushing, a few dozen hydroplanes still came to our town. We were expecting them within a few days, as the autumn manœuvres would be held by the beginning of the next week. A young Dutch flier whom we had met through Charles Kingsford-Smith (Charles used to spend practically all his spare time with us while preparing for his flight to America) had arrived a few days before to make the necessary arrangements for the ground crews and the repair men. And as luck or ill-luck would have it, he knocked at our door on this evening of all evenings and only a few minutes before our guests were supposed to make their appearance.

When he noticed that we were expecting company, he politely excused himself and said that he must leave immediately, but apparently there was something on his mind which he felt that he must tell us, and right away, too.



SIGNOR DANTE AND HIS RETINUE WERE SLOWLY WALKING  
TOWARDS VEERE

even a little less. But you are right when you say that he was an Italian and tried to fly."

"That's all very lovely and interesting, but what in heaven's name has it got to do with the Nazi bastard up there who is spying on our forts just now?"

"That's where you are wrong. That isn't a Nazi bastard. That was the old Italian—himself and in person."

"Impossible!"

"In Veere, everything is possible."

"I thought you never touched the stuff! When did you take up drinking?"

"I am as sober as I have been these last fifty years, but if you will sit still for just a moment, I'll tell you something—only promise me that you will never say a word about what you are going to see here to-night."

"Good God! Are you working for the Germans too, and do you want to bribe me to keep my mouth shut by a glass of sherry and a slice of roast beef?"

"Don't be silly," I told him. "We hoped that no one would ever get on to what we have been doing these last four months. You happen to have stumbled on our little secret. We now make you our partner in crime. I have only a few minutes but here is the story," and I told him about our mysterious dinners.

The young Dutchman absolutely refused to believe me. "The trouble with you," he said, "is that you have been working too hard. You have read too many books. You have gone crazy."

"Remember this is Veere."

"Sure, I know, and I also know that one can get away with a hell of a lot of things in this funny little village. But when you tell me that I am about to have dinner with an Italian who has been dead and buried for the last five hundred years—I tell you, you are cuckoo and I am going home and tell your wife to call for you and bring the doctor. Good-night to you all, but I am off!"

And he would have gone too, except that just as he opened the door, he found himself face to face with Leonardo, who in French but with a strong Italian accent asked him whether this was the house where he was expected for dinner that evening. Completely taken aback by this strange meeting, the poor Dutch boy had not the slightest idea what to do. So he clicked his heels in his best military style, gave the new arrival a salute which made me fear that all the buttons of his uniform would snap off, and in his awkward schoolbook French he barked back, "*Oui, monsieur, C'est la maison.*"

"*Alors, on peut entrer,*" Leonardo continued, "and I shall be very glad



IT WAS LEONARDO, COMING DOWN IN HIS GLIDER

"They don't seem to know quite what to do with their—shall I call them 'companions'?" he explained, and he pointed to the pig-like monster I had noticed on the Middelburg road with a little black devil riding on his back.

"What do they want to do with them?" I asked. "They don't want them to come in, I hope."

"No," Erasmus answered, "but they have had a long walk and are tired out. They are wondering whether we could give those creatures something to eat."

"Of course," I said, "just let them tell us what they want. Meat or vegetables or stale bread or milk—or whatever they want."

Erasmus relayed this message to Virgil. Then he turned to Jo, who had joined us to ask what she could get these strange visitors, and said, "I am afraid that none of those would do. Milk and bread are too mild for them, but if you have a few hot coals for them from your kitchen stove and perhaps a little carbolic acid to quench their thirst, that would just about suit them."

"Nothing easier," said our ever-cheerful Jo, and a moment later she returned with a pailful of hot coals from the kitchen stove and a china bowl full of undiluted carbolic acid which we had bought once upon a time to disinfect an old cesspool in the garden.

Virgil expressed his profound gratitude and said, "Those will be wonderful. The poor things—they are completely exhausted," and a moment later a contented series of grunts and squeaks showed us that Dante's humble companions were enjoying their meal.

Then at last we could introduce everybody to everybody else, and at the same time Hein started the gramophone, but he must have made a mistake, for instead of giving us Jacopo Peri, whom I had chosen for our first number, he started with a Mozart record, *Martern aller Arten* from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, sung by Ria Ginster. I was about to go upstairs and correct this error when I caught sight of Leonardo. He seemed so enraptured by the melody that for a moment he had forgotten all about his aviator. Then he looked at Dante, and Dante, for the first time that evening, indulged in a slight movement of the lips which in a normal person would have been called a smile, and both of them were evidently delighted with what they were hearing.

"What was it?" Leonardo asked when the music stopped. I told him. "And who was this Mozart? An Italian?"

"Alas, no. He was merely an Austrian."

"He deserved to have been an Italian," Dante said. "I never heard so lovely a song."

thereby flattered by this allusion to Zeeland's richness, returned the compliment by an off-hand recital of whole pages from the *Eclogues*, the Latin poet's joy knew no bounds.

"What a delight!" he said, "and what a surprise! After all these many hundreds of years, I am still being remembered? I had never dared to hope for so much fame. When I was told to guide our noble Florentine friend through hell, I felt that I had reached the height of my career. But to discover that you, my most honoured pupil, are able to speak my verses and in such pure Latin and after all these many, many years—it is incredible, and I am grateful indeed!"

That, however, was a mere side play, for Leonardo was the star performer of the evening. Having squeezed the Dutch flier so completely dry upon the subject of aeronautics that the poor fellow gasped for air and drank more whiskies and soda than were good for him, he tackled Frits upon the subject of our polders. He wanted to know, first of all, how we had dried the land, next how we kept the water inside the polders at just the right level, how we drained our meadows, how many head of cattle we could feed on how small a piece of land, how we managed our locks, and whether the farms belonged to those who worked them, and whether we had the same problem of absentee landlordism which had caused him so much trouble when he was trying to irrigate the plains of Lombardy.

From there Leonardo switched over to music, and it was then that I asked him whether he would be interested in examining a lute which, some twenty years before, I had ordered to be made in Munich, a rather complicated affair with four extra strings—four so-called *Brummer*. He said that he would be delighted, and I went upstairs to get it. I had long since given up trying to learn it seriously. I had found the lute so much more difficult than the violin, especially for the right hand, that it used up all the time I needed for my fiddle, and my fiddling too was rapidly going to pieces, now that I had begun to write those big books to which I owed the fact that I could live in our beloved Veere. I still knew enough about the lute to be able to keep the instrument in tune, and when Leonardo got his hands on it, he found it in perfect working order. He was as pleased as a pianist who, after a long trip in the hinterland, once more puts his feet on the pedals of a Steinway Grand.

"A beautiful piece of craftsmanship," he said, looking tenderly at the long, slender neck. "But tell me, how do you tune these four extra strings?"

I explained that they were supposed to be tuned according to the principal chords you intended to use and showed him how it was done.

"You play too?" he asked.

I told him that I had tried to learn it but that I had found it impossible

to be faithful to both the lute and to the violin. He answered that he agreed and that the lute, if one wanted to play it well, took all one's time. Then he asked me whether I had one of my violins in the house, and I said, "Yes, my second-best one." I kept my Santo Serafino at home, where it was much drier than at Frits' place, which was inhabited only two days a week.

"Get your violin, will you?" Leonardo begged me and, after he had carefully inspected it, he asked me to tune it to his lute.

"And now we will play," he said. "We will play something in the old Italian style and we shall play to honour the greatest of our Italian poets. We will play something slow and stately and in keeping with Signor Dante's incomparable style."

Then followed one of those delightful sessions which make people who are not familiar with music gasp with wonderment, though it is really extremely simple, if you happen to have been born with the gift. Leonardo and I began to improvise. We felt our way about for a moment, then sort of got the 'feel' of each other, united on a comfortable key, and off we were.

We kept at it for more than an hour.

I do not remember what we played. Ideas came and ideas went, and sometimes the lute took the lead and sometimes the fiddle, but these changes were achieved by a sort of silent instinctive consent, and as soon as one of the members of our audience asked us, "Now give us something French," or "Play that tune the way the old Flemings would have done it," or "Let us have that in the Spanish manner," we did as they bade us do as automatically and easily as well-trained horses going from a trot into a gallop.

To spend an evening doing that sort of thing when we could have talked to the author of *The Divine Comedy* may seem a complete waste of time, but if the author of the greatest poem ever written in any language is tongue-tied and refuses to utter more than a few words every fifteen minutes or so, there is little you can do about it. Apparently the poor exile had been for so long a time accustomed to keep his ideas to himself that he had lost the habit of thinking out loud. Whereas Leonardo, dwelling most of his life in the companionship of one of the princes for whom he worked or spending his days in a studio filled with young and enthusiastic apprentices, was completely at his ease in any kind of company. And being an artist rather than a writer, his emotions could find expression by means of his fingers. Unlike Dante, he was not merely a teller of tales who must write down combinations of words to communicate his ideas to his fellow-men. Accustomed to recreate the world by means of a lump of clay or a brush or the entrails of a sheep transformed into



a string, he was able to convey an almost endless variety of nuances, shades, accents, and intonations to his audience by everything he said. This, by the way, is a quality I have detected in a great **many** other painters and sculptors and musicians, who are apt to be much better conversationalists than their colleagues of the goose quill.

The manner of our parting was the usual one. But to our surprise, the young flier excused himself immediately after our guests had disappeared. We urged him to stay for at least one more whisky and soda, but he said no—he was very busy with a number of reports and had to send a call through to the navy department in The Hague. We knew that as it was Saturday, every official of the navy department had left the office hours before. He therefore must have something else on his mind, and as it could not be a girl (Veere was not that kind of village), we were at a loss to account for his haste in bidding us farewell. But after all, he was free, white, and twenty-one, and it was none of our business.

As soon as he had closed the door behind him, Frits found the solution.

"I'll bet you ten guilders to one," he said, "old Leonardo talked him into giving him a ride in his aeroplane. It is dark, and nobody will be any the wiser."

"I'll take you on. We will ask him to-morrow, for I told him to come for breakfast. Good-night and thanks for a most delightful evening. Good-night, Jo-o-o-o! Good-night, Hein!"

From the kitchen came a cheerful good-night—and the remark that one of those two Italians must have been very handsome when he was young.

I stepped out into the dark, for there was supposed to be a full moon, and when the calendar said "full moon," Veere's six street lanterns were not lighted—a matter of economy. The snow was beginning to melt, and it was very slippery. I had to walk carefully. Just before I reached our own house I stopped, struck by a strange noise.

A moment later I knew that I had lost my guilder. High up in the air, a flying-machine was gaily looping the loop.

for and all his tanks and machine-guns, they suddenly get up on a very high horse and tell you, 'My dear sir, the Germans have not yet forgotten what happened to their naval ambitions during the last war. They will never repeat that mistake.' That this fellow Hitler also has the strongest army the world has ever seen is a matter of complete indifference to them.

"And then we are off. I ask them to remember that during the Great War they had the American fleet on their side, but that only makes them mad, and they have their answer ready. 'But of course the Americans will again fight with us.' No use telling them that this time the Americans might refuse to be as obliging as they were in 1917, and that the American people have grown sick and tired of being called Uncle Shylock, and that it will be much more difficult to get them into the next war.

"But in France—God help us! In France they are not only fast asleep when it comes to the present situation, but the whole country is rotten through and through. Everybody is thinking only of himself. Every man and every woman has his or her price. You can buy Ministers, and if necessary you can buy their wives. To get this loan of ours started—why, in England we could have done it for the price of a couple of ads in two or three of the big newspapers. But in France we had to grease everybody's palm, from the Minister of Finance down to the fellow in a cocked hat who stands in front of the Banque de France."

"That was a nice thing to do," said Lucie, who was going to love the French in spite of everything. "An honest, pure-hearted little Dutchman bribing French officials."

"Don't be foolish," Frits told her. "It did not bother my conscience in the least little bit. I never knew anything about it. We employed three French lawyers. They did all the dirty work. They merely sent us the bills, and we paid them after they had showed us a list of the men they had 'approached.' It was that list that frightened me. It made me feel that there was not an honest man left in all France. And if there should be another war, I am afraid that this time there would not be another Verdun. There won't even be much of a fight. France will blow up like a kid's balloon hit by papa's cigar."

"And worst of all, the brighter Frenchmen seem perfectly aware of this, but they shrug their shoulders and say, 'What can we do? It is the Government that is at fault. We now have a democracy, *notre chère démocratie française*!' And they are right. They have their famous French democracy. Every third-rate provincial lawyer considers himself a Danton, every country doctor feels that he is destined to become another Clemenceau. But none of them care a hoot for the country as a whole. On every street-corner some one is making a speech. In every café some

grand person," he agreed, "but that long-faced Florentine with the laurel leaves dangling from his cap, who sat and sat and drank our wine and said nothing at all and made Jo feed hot coals and carbolic acid to his pet hog—no, I am afraid he did not impress me very much. But the old painter and inventor—he was wonderful! I hope he got home safely and did not break his neck."

Then and there we decided on our new guests. Next Saturday we would request the honour of the presence of François Rabelais, M.D., of Lyons, France, and Michel de Montaigne, honorary citizen of Rome, Italy.

They had been contemporaries and they had been Frenchmen. Here was a chance to go in for some fancy culinary effects. For once, too, we would have experienced wine-drinkers with us, as Montaigne came from Bordeaux, and Rabelais hailed from the Touraine. There was only one wine that was good enough for these true connoisseurs, and by chance I had been offered a dozen bottles of it only a few days before. I refer, of course, to Châteauneuf du Pape and Châteauneuf of the vintage of the year 1921. Neither Frits nor I believed in the theory that a meal can be enjoyed only if you serve a different wine with every course. One kind, either red or white, drunk all through the meal is much more satisfactory, provided it is of outstanding quality, and the sun-baked grapes of the hillsides near the old papal city of Avignon—when they are at their best—no, they have never been surpassed.

The menu was not so easily settled. We intended to do our best, and I felt that I needed Lucie's help if we wanted to surpass all our previous efforts. We spent the whole afternoon on the meal and turned the leaves of my old *Cuisinier français* until both of us were dizzy. Here is what we finally chose.

First of all, a *soupe à l'oignon à la Stanislas*. This was absolutely safe. Every Frenchman seems to have an inborn passion for onion soup, and so we could not possibly go wrong.

Next, *filets de sole à la sauce ravigote*, and as our main course, *faisans à la Périgueux*. The latter would have to be served in the ancient style with their feathers on so as to give them a lifelike appearance, a job which Hein, who was the handy-man around the house, would love to undertake. The vegetables were to be the inevitable string beans and carrots, for Holland in the autumn does not offer much of a choice when it comes to fresh vegetables, and we tried as much as possible to do without canned ones.

After the pheasant there was to be a huge bowl of salad with hard-boiled eggs and that tiny bit of garlic in the dressing which all Frenchmen

and Italians so dearly love. For the benefit of Erasmus and the other Dutchmen, there also must be a small leek cut up in slices, and tarragon vinegar, of course.

And then (for this time we would have guests who knew what a real dinner should be), an extra course right after the bird—a course consisting of cold lobster with mayonnaise (Lucie had offered to make her own special mayonnaise for us that evening), and finally, for dessert, a *macédoine de fruits à la kirsch*. The fruits would have to be preserved ones, but at The Hague we could get the pineapple in which to serve it.

Coffee? Yes—no—yes! Erasmus had come to depend upon his little after-dinner cup, so why not let the others try it too? If they did not like it, they need not drink it.

After dinner, only one liqueur—the last bottle of our 1837 cognac, but, as far as I was concerned, the best was hardly good enough for Montaigne. I owed him a heavy debt of gratitude. When I was quite young, his book had become my Bible, and it has remained so ever since.

I need offer no apologies for my interest in Montaigne. He is one of those perfectly mannered philosophers whom you can safely take with you into any kind of company. Perhaps a word or so beforehand to your hostess, just as an act of civility. “Elizabeth, my dear, do you mind if I bring a very charming Frenchman with me to-night? He won’t be any bother, he is an old friend and I am sure you will like him.”

“Why, of course not! Bring him by all means, and what did you say his name was?”

“Montaigne—Michel de Montaigne. He is a writer. Several of his books have been translated into English. You may have heard of him.”

“Of course I have! The last time we were on the Riviera we met some delightful people by that name—French people from Bordeaux, I think. Perhaps he’s related to them?”

“Very likely, and he will be so much interested to hear about his cousins. Thank you for your kindness! You want to see us at about seven—if I remember correctly.”

“That is what the invitation said. But I know you are not a drinker. It will probably be eight o’clock before we sit down at table, so suppose you and your friend come at seven-thirty, unless he insists upon a few cocktails.”

“I hardly think so. He has gout. He has to be very careful about what he drinks.”

“Fine! Seven-thirty it is, and we’ll be delighted to meet your French friend, Monsieur de Montaigne. Good-night! My love to Jimmie and Noodle.”

"Good-night, and thank you."

Whereupon you tell Michel that you are sorry you have got to take him out for dinner the night he is coming, but it is Thursday and the servants have that day off. Besides, your friends, the Whoozises, have a lovely house. They also put up a very good table. The husband is perhaps not very exciting, but Elizabeth is very beautiful, if a bit gushing. And Jimmie will pretend that she has a headache and will use that as an excuse to go home early. And then we can sit in the library the rest of the evening and have a glass of hot Swedish punch and talk about the happy days the last time we met in Paris.

Then it is Thursday, and the party is a delightful affair. Your friend Michel is the success of the evening. He has been everywhere and he knows everybody and he is terribly good at telling amusing stories, and one of the guests, a college professor, has even read some of his books, though he does not entirely approve of the author's style, and the hostess is delighted and is very grateful to you for having brought that charming and delightful guest.

But Rabelais? He is a different kettle of fish altogether, and the moment you mention his name, your friend raises an inquiring eyebrow and says, "Rabelais! You surely cannot mean that you would expose us to the man who wrote those horrible stories about a giant—let me see—what was his name? Gargantua or something like that—just like the big ape. For if it is he I will have to rearrange my whole table. I could not very well let him sit next to Aunt Mary, who is going to be with us that night. Her father, you remember, was a bishop. And then John's boss is going to be there too, the president of the bank for which he works, and he is an elder in a Congregational church. He is rather a puritan too, except that he likes his cocktails, and of course, I don't want to spoil John's chances. I suppose, if you insist, I have got to let you bring him, but ask him not to use those dreadful words of which his books are so full. They may be funny to some people, but I never could see why words must be dirty in order to be funny, and so—you won't mind, will you?—but please tell him to be as nice as that other friend of yours, that Monsieur de Montaigne whom you brought that other time. We all loved him!"

Unfortunately, that is more or less the reputation poor Dr Rabelais has acquired during the last four hundred years. He is now chiefly known as a man who wallowed in dirt for dirt's sake, who created gigantic figures, obscene and grotesque figures, for the sheer joy of having them perform obscene and grotesque arts, and as an author who may have been funny in the eyes of his contemporaries but who to-day should no longer be tolerated in polite society.

envy and who only tolerates such rivalry when he fully approves of the efforts of his human contestants. Let me show you what I mean by a concrete example. What does King Henry of France mean to us, of to-day? At best a name and a date, unless we remember his Majesty because he was said to have been the lover of the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, the girl whose statue still delights us when we meet her in the Louvre.

But say Gargantua or Pantagruel, and we find ourselves immediately in the heart of a mysterious land of giants and titans, with King Gargousier making merry war on his neighbour, King Picrochole, and with Friar John—and what a friar!—deliberately and successfully upsetting all the accepted rules of sound pedagogy, while in the distance we behold the Abbey of Thélème standing forth in majestic glory and quietly reflecting its high walls and its slender turrets in the blue waves of a lovely mountain lake.

Not that Rabelais was the only writer who ever succeeded in doing this sort of thing. We have already mentioned the author of *Don Quixote*. Then there was the famous case connected with Queen Anne of England. That lady was about as complete a nonentity as ever graced a throne. Talk about Queen Anne, and at best she will remind the average listener of beautiful little tables with very slender legs (not by any means modelled after those of her Majesty!) and of certain other pieces of furniture that stood in Grandmother's parlour. But mention the two magic words *Robinson Crusoe*, and forthwith a lonely island rises from the placid Pacific and a man with a beard and a funny-looking peaked cap is anxiously studying strange footsteps in the sands of the shore, and we become young once more and we have just built a hut in the empty lot next door and we are waiting for our own man Friday (our younger brother turned blackamoor by means of a burnt cork) to come and tell us that he has seen the sails of a ship rapidly approaching our domains, which means that we must make ready to defend our possessions against still another attack of buccaneers.

Or, again, who to-day still takes the slightest interest in George I or George II, or, for that matter, in the policies of a Walpole or a Pitt? But every one of us is so thoroughly familiar with the land of Lilliput that we would not be in the least surprised if in some hidden corner of New Zealand, a few hundred miles beyond Erewhon, a traveller should suddenly have come upon the last remaining survivors of the tribe of the Lilliputians, living there peacefully in their tiny houses, eating from miniature plates and raising diminutive children who go sailing in nutshells on lakes no larger than a bathtub.

And then—I had almost forgotten him—there was our guest of last

week, who gave us an *Inferno* (which he most surely can never have seen with his own eyes) vastly more convincing to us than all the real countries any of us have ever read about in Baedeker.

One final idea upon this pleasant subject. Were not the men and women and the dogs and cats whom we met in the pages of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tales infinitely more real than those flesh-and-blood uncles and aunts whom we had to visit every Sunday and of whom we remember nothing except that Uncle Moritz wore a wig and that Aunt Amy had a red nose as the result of a perpetual cold? But was there any doubt about the number of buttons on the coat of Hans Christian's soldier?

As for the life of Rabelais, there really is not very much to tell. He was born about two years before Columbus discovered America. He saw the light of day in Chinon, a small town in the province of Touraine. His father was either an apothecary (most likely) or a tavern-keeper (less likely). While still quite young he was persuaded to enter a Franciscan monastery, but he soon became suspected of heresies, chiefly on account of his preference for the study of the law over that of religion. He was not actually found guilty, but just the same he thought it wiser to bid farewell to his Franciscan brethren, and to join the Benedictines, who made a speciality of learning, in contrast to the Franciscans, who went in primarily for preaching and were rather suspicious of the wisdom of this world.

After five more years of a cloistered existence, Rabelais began to feel that he had made a mistake in the choice of his vocation and that he would never make a good monk. He then tried to qualify as a secular priest, but with even less success. As he would have to make some kind of living, he next played with the idea of becoming a physician. He went to the University of Montpellier and at last he had found his true vocation. In less than a year's time he was allowed to deliver lectures on Galen and Hippocrates, the two great oracles upon whose books (written respectively thirteen hundred and nineteen hundred years before) the doctors of that day depended exclusively for their diagnoses and clinical information.

Here and there in Italy a few courageous surgeons had reached the bold conclusion that in order to know all about sick people one should with one's own eyes observe and study sick people. But as the Church remained adamant in its opposition to the dissecting of human bodies, anatomy was still in its infancy, and when the physician came to the bedside of his patient, he would look up his symptoms in his copies of Galen and Hippocrates and would then dose him according to the somewhat antiquated prescriptions of these ancient worthies. It was not a

very satisfactory system from the point of view of the patient, who usually died, but it saved his doctor from being burned at the stake, and the doctors therefore were quite willing to let bad enough alone.

In the year 1532, Rabelais left Montpellier, knowing as much about medicine as could be learned in those days of endless pills and purges, and settled down in the city of Lyons, where he was appointed intern to the town hospital and was allowed to do something so bold that it was considered positively revolutionary. He was given permission to lecture on anatomy with demonstrations from the human body.

It was during his internship in Lyons that Rabelais began to do a little writing, as we would say to-day. Out of these early attempts grew the gigantic world of Gargantua, Pantagruel, and all their jovial companions. He worked at his books only in his spare time—or at least he said so—but the city fathers, who soon became aware of his literary ambitions, had reasons to doubt this and were not at all pleased. The pride of their hospital was supposed to attend to the business of curing the sick and could not go gallivanting all over the countryside whenever his muse got hold of him. This was a serious matter, for, contrary to all rules, the eminent Dr Rabelais had got into the habit of taking French leave whenever he tired of his job and on such occasions he was apt to stay away for two or three weeks at a time, only showing up when he had finished a few more chapters and was ready to undergo a little more hospital drudgery.

As a sixteenth-century surgeon was not, as a rule, a rich man, the magistrates at first wondered where their doctor went during those self-granted vacations. Rabelais was more than willing to tell. As a young man he had gained the good-will of a very powerful family—that of the du Bellays. When one of the du Bellay sons became a cardinal, Rabelais on several occasions accompanied him to Rome. This token of high clerical favour gave him such an excellent social rating with the Lyons magistrates that instead of fining him, as they would have done any ordinary doctor, or curtly dismissing him, they meekly appointed a substitute whenever their regular house physician chose to play hooky. It was, from their intern's point of view, an almost ideal arrangement and undoubtedly of great benefit to the patients.

Well, the years went by, and the Rabelaisian manuscript increased in size so much that it had attracted the attention of both the court and the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne (ever faithful to its reputation of being an ice-house of reactionary sentiments) gave evidence of its interest in this strange medical cleric by condemning his books and ordering them to be burned by the public hangman. That was a sign to the royal court, then presided over by the amiable and accomplished King Francis I, to show its appreciation of the Doctor's works by reading them, by laughing over them

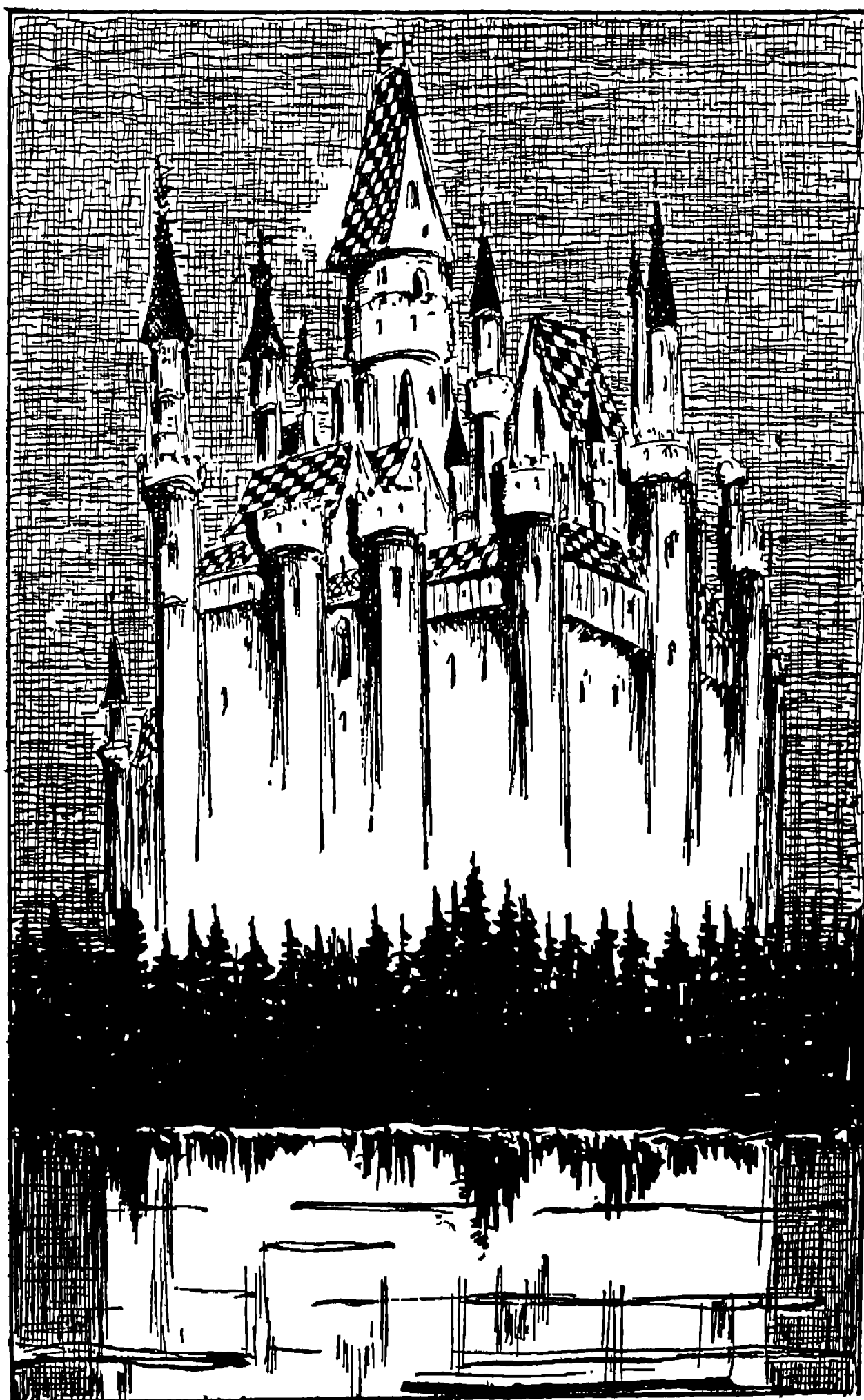


Having thus paid his respects to the field of education, the good Doctor then examines the inanities of warfare as practised in every part of the world, and through the mouth of a certain Friar John he gives us a circumstantial account of the violence with which Gargantua's father and his neighbour, King Picrochole, went after each other, smote their hundreds of thousands, and left everything exactly as it had been before.

This conflict, which settled nothing, having come to an end by means of a peace which settled even less, Gargantua decides to go in for a short detour which leads him into the field of social service. I am sorry to say that the method he chooses to improve his fellow-men and make them conscious of their duties towards each other is not quite according to our modern pattern. There was, of course, nothing new about the idea of building a religious retreat. Monasteries had been going up for more than twelve hundred years. But the Abbey of Thélème of which Gargantua became the founder was indeed a unique institution. For whereas, in all other similar establishments, you were supposed to spend your life in sackcloth and ashes, performing highly uncongenial tasks, the rules of Thélème insisted that you do exactly as you please.

In making an arrangement of that sort, Rabelais showed a lamentable lack of understanding of man's true nature. I cannot for the life of me imagine anything more dreadful than to be obliged all day long to do what I want to do. But I think that I know what was actually in the good Doctor's mind. Rabelais lived in an age of repressions and as a physician he realized what too much moral restraint will do to the average normal human being. His abbey, with its gay device of "Do as you please," was really a sort of sixteenth-century sanatorium maintained for the benefit of those who needed a few months' escape from the burdens of everyday life. Our modern psychiatrists might well look into this matter. An Abbey of Thélème built in the heart of many of our more isolated country districts would save hundreds of thousands of poor women from their unavoidable fate and would therefore be a godsend to the taxpayer, a good proportion of whose involuntary contributions to the state now go to the maintenance of our lunatic asylums.

There is a lot more in the chronicle of Gargantua, but these little excerpts will do. They will have shown you that Dr Rabelais' flight into the realm of fancy was of a very different nature from that of Signor Dante, who also constructed a non-existent world in order that he might give us his reflections upon its living counterpart. What Dante meant to achieve was so simple that everybody could understand it. He meant to settle his private score with those who had thwarted him in his political ambitions. But even now, after almost four centuries of careful studies, the friends



THE ABBEY OF THÉLÈME—THE DREAM OF RABELAIS'S LIFE

a tropical empire fifty times larger than the homeland and who depended for his safety against hundreds of thousands of natives upon a handful of ex-convicts armed with harquebuses and swords. My tribulations are of a different sort and do not as constantly affect me. But when the whole world seems to be out of gear (as it does these days with ever-increasing regularity), then it is very soothing to have old Michel by the side of your bed and spend half an hour communing with him before you find escape in sleep.

I have been fortunate enough in life to come across quite a few people who were endowed with such delightfully even temperaments that they could take you completely out of yourself and were able to make you forget all the tribulations of the day. But the number of books able to perform this same useful service is very small indeed. I tried to write them all down last night and I could not think of more than half a dozen which qualified for my list of honour, and think of the millions of books that have been printed since old John Gooseflesh, *vulgo* Gutenberg, died in poverty and obscurity!

Now Montaigne is the one man who has never failed me, and for that reason I respect and venerate his name. Sometimes, I must confess, I will skip a few of his classical references, for I was taught Latin and Greek so badly that even after seven years of hard labour among Homer and Virgil they are still picture puzzles to me which have to be solved more by luck than by actual knowledge.

Montaigne, who seems to have absorbed his classics together with his mother's milk, quoted Homer and Ovid as readily as I quote Goethe or Vondel. It meant absolutely nothing to him to slide from French into the tongue of the Romans and the Athenians and then back again into his native French. To me, those lines of Plutarch and Cicero, with which he juggled so elegantly, mean a painful groping for half-forgotten words and completely forgotten rules of syntax, and therefore I usually hasten as quickly as I can through those pages in which the Frenchman indulges in his favourite hobby. That, however, is an easy trick for a fast reader (as any honest book-reviewer will confess), and there remains the bulk of the text, which like a mighty mountain stream rushes towards the sea through a landscape of unparalleled charm and loveliness. Let me but spend half an hour on the banks of this river, and all will be well again with me and with the world at large. Wherefore I here and now pay homage to Michel de Montaigne's memory and gratefully proclaim myself his most humble pupil.

My good teacher was born in February of the year 1533. He therefore was another one of those winter babies who have played such an important rôle in the history of the world because they were conceived in the spring,

the time of year which from the beginning of creation has been the natural mating season for all mammals, including *Homo sapiens*.

Montaigne's family name was Eyquem, but the Eyquem had been dropped after the family had obtained possession of the castle of Montaigne, not far from the city of Bordeaux in the southern part of France. Michel's father, Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne, had been in trade and so had his grandfather. Those who did not like Michel (and he was far too witty not to have made himself some very choice enemies) were very apt to hint that this change in name had been the result of a desire to make the public at large forget the very honourable beginnings of the now distinguished family. There may have been some truth in this accusation. The desire for a fine-looking genealogy going back to the days of Cæsar and a coat of arms of sixteen quarterings is a perfectly normal one and a very harmless hobby, compared with the foolish ways in which rich people are apt to spend their money. But as Montaigne, in his books at least, gives no evidence whatsoever of any kind of intellectual and political snobbery, we can dismiss this bit of gossip as envy on the part of his less enlightened neighbours.

To-day they would probably have attacked him from a somewhat different angle. They would have inquired into his mother's ancestry and then would have given each other a knowing look: "You see? We told you so!" For his mother was undoubtedly of Jewish origin, and that of course explained why her son was so much quicker and so much more cosmopolitan than the ordinary, hundred per cent. pure Frenchman.

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? It sounds painfully familiar. And what can we do about it? Not very much, I am afraid, until we shall have changed our entire system of education and shall have cured our children of the belief that there is such a thing as a chosen race, which is as absurd a claim as that of belonging to a super-race.

Yes, Montaigne's mother was undoubtedly Jewish. She belonged to the powerful family of the Louppesses (now modernized into Lopez) which for many centuries had played quite a rôle in Spanish history. During the government of that doleful couple of fanatics, Ferdinand and Isabella, the Louppesses had been forced to accept baptism. The few drops of holy water sprinkled upon their foreheads may have performed a miracle in the matter of faith, but they had not been able to extinguish the flames of genius which burned so brightly in that extraordinary family, and if Montaigne must be accepted as a typical result of a mixed marriage, then I can only regret that both my parents and all my ancestors were so one-sidedly Dutch.

Montaigne's father too seems to have been a man of more than ordinary ability, a queerish sort of person and saved by his intelligence and common

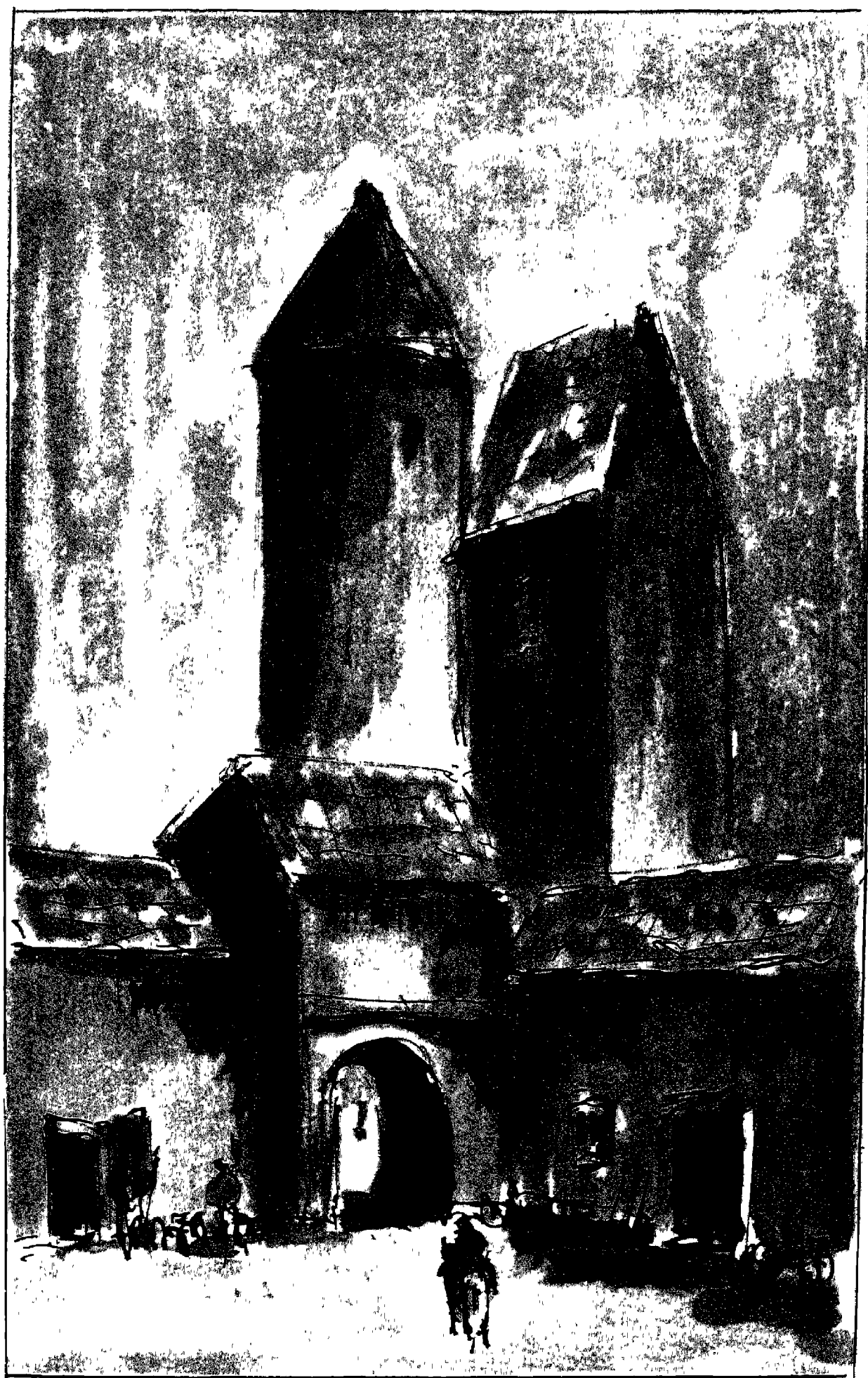
sense from being a freak. He was very original in his educational theories. After Michel became his heir—in consequence of the death of his two older brothers—the father decided that his only surviving son must be given every opportunity to amount to something. Believing that a direct contact with good earth was essential to every child's physical welfare, old Montaigne sent the infant to be nursed by a peasant woman in a near-by village and insisted that the son of the squire be brought up on a footing of absolute equality with the children of his future retainers. After his preliminary course in the simpler aspects of life, little Michel was brought back to his father's castle. But here he was attended by servants who spoke only Latin (God knows where Papa Montaigne had found them!), and every morning he was awakened by the playing of beautiful music.

This so hastened the intellectual development of the boy that already at the age of six he was ready to go to a public school, which in Europe has always meant a private school—to differentiate it from a clerical school. At thirteen he proceeded from his private school to the university. There he studied law, and at the age of twenty-one we find him a member of the town government of Bordeaux.

Such a career was, of course, only possible for a young gentleman of independent means and with a considerable amount of political pull. These same fortunate circumstances enabled Michel to pay frequent visits to the court in Paris. They also accounted for his term of service in the royal army. Otherwise there is nothing much to report about the first thirty years of our guest's life.

Montaigne was a very civil young man (as there were thousands of others in the France of that era). He went out into society (as did thousands of other polite young men in France at that time). But when he had eaten all the dinners that were to be eaten (although in moderation) and had drunk all the wine there was to be drunk (see above!) and had made love to all the charming young women who were there to be made love to (not quite so moderately, I regret to say), he did something that none of the other polite young men of France of that time had ever thought of doing. He not only confessed that his present mode of existence had greatly begun to pall upon him as an unprofitable waste of energy, but he also announced that he intended to devote the rest of his days to some useful task and henceforth would not merely content himself with political sinecures and the administration of his estate.

The useful task Montaigne thereupon set himself was nothing less than the writing of a book in which, for the first time in the history of the human race, a man would tell about himself and his reactions to everything that had ever happened to him with *absolute honesty*. Let me repeat it—WITH ABSOLUTE HONESTY.



MONTAIGNE'S IVORY TOWER

morning he got up, went to Holy Mass (for he was most faithful in the observation of his religious duties), partook of his breakfast, and then took a look out of his lofty tower window. After so many years, he should have known the landscape by heart, but every time it delighted him as much as if he had never seen it before, and whatever caught his eye became thereupon a welcome subject for a short meditative essay.

That everlasting sense of wonder undoubtedly accounts for the delightful and ever-surprising variety among the titles of his chapters. "On Being Sad" precedes a dissertation upon "Philosophy as a Means of Learning How to Die Happily." After he has pondered upon the unfortunate consequences of being a pedant, he discusses the desirability of reading lots of good books. Cannibals attract his attention, but so does male and female dress. Having delivered himself of two short sermons upon "The Art of Going to Sleep" and "The Vanity of Words," he will suddenly ask himself how it is possible "to laugh and cry over the same thing at the same moment."

Drunkenness comes in for some very poignant remarks, but so does abstinence. Friendship and loyalty too are studied as carefully as the ceremonies which prevail at royal courts and the fact that what is caviar to one person is nothing but a dish of over-salty fish-eggs to the next one.

This method of writing without design quite naturally divides Montaigne's readers into two hostile camps. Those who believe that we should go through life browsing and that the joy of a journey consists in following every possible detour rather than in reaching the place of your destination in the shortest possible period of time—they will love Montaigne and will find him the best of travelling companions. Whereas the boys and girls who want to get things done and who want to save time (and for what purpose, may I ask?) will call him a hopeless egotist and will refuse to have anything to do with him.

They make no bones about their feelings. "We will wait until the 'Confessions of Raymund de Sabunde' (isn't that the chapter in which he is supposed to explain his own philosophy of life?) has been reduced to three pages," so they will tell you, "and then we will read it in one of our digest magazines (provided we have nothing better to do), but until that shall have been done, the old Frenchman is too wordy for us, he talks too much, he is one of those French bores who will waste a whole afternoon over one single glass of wine, discussing the meaning of a certain line in the latest opus of some long-haired poet who has just starved in a garret on Montparnasse."

Literature in some ways is very much like religion. You either like a certain point of view and accept it unqualifiedly, or you don't like it and there is no use talking about it. The Montaignards will continue to love

been accepted and has been elevated to the rank of dogma, can be used to crush its former friends and to establish itself as a tyrant, infinitely more cruel and unrelenting than the tyrants it has just helped to crush.

The doubt of which these prophets spoke had something of the divine about it. It did not consist in asking futile and superficial questions, like over-bright children trying to make the lives of their Sunday-school teachers miserable by asking, "Please, Miss Jones, what is God?" It was a very humble kind of doubt. It was full of reverence before the very subject it happened to doubt. But it was doubt, nevertheless, a wavering of opinion and a fear of coming to definite conclusions before one could be absolutely certain that all the evidence now at last available was in—that somewhere or other beyond the distant mountain ranges the jealous gods were not still hiding a few scraps of the ultimate verities, which they intended to preserve strictly for themselves as being much too good for mere mortals.

Scepticism, as we understand it to-day, is the philosophy which claims that outside the field of science no absolute knowledge is possible and that no fact or truth can be established upon philosophical grounds alone. It therefore preaches the gospel of suspended judgment.

I don't know much about such things (being an artist rather than an historian or a philosopher), but it seems to me that the sceptics who have played a rôle in history have been about as fine a body of men as ever lived and that on the whole they have been more useful in making our world a little more civilized than any other group of spiritual leaders. From the days of Pythagoras until those of Immanuel Kant, they have been distinguished by their moderation and tolerance, their willingness to listen to both sides of every controversy, and their unwillingness to pass harsh judgments upon those who disagreed with them.

And of none of them can this be said more truthfully than of Michel de Montaigne. He accepted life as he found it. He declared that in his eyes it was neither entirely good nor entirely evil, because everything depended upon the way one approached the problems of everyday existence. Just as in the case of Voltaire, his original scepticism was afterwards modified by his conviction that in the end reason would provide a solution for most of our difficulties. Therefore, as Montaigne grew older, he became more and more of a stoic. He did his best to rise superior to both pain and pleasure, but in this he never quite succeeded. He was too essentially healthy in his reactions, too much a product of the fertile soil of France, to set himself as entirely apart from all ordinary human experiences and emotions as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius or the slave Epictetus had tried to do fourteen hundred years before.



The mother and daughter were the only two women who played any kind of rôle in his life, with the exception of one other person of the female persuasion, whom I shall mention in a moment.

Montaigne was always held in great esteem at the royal court, and his former Gascon neighbour, Henry of Navarre, was for ever trying to persuade him to return to Paris. Michel declined his Majesty's flattering invitation as regularly as Spinoza was to decline those of an even mightier potentate, the great King Louis XIV of France. Both men were grateful for the honour bestowed upon them, but the one thing they valued more than anything else in this world was their personal freedom. They therefore could not permit themselves to be caught in a position where they might be beholden to some one else for their daily bread and butter.

Henry was intelligent enough not to take offence at his subject's rebuff, while Montaigne from his side gave expression to his feeling of loyalty by an occasional visit to the city of Paris. He would then pay homage to his ruler, but as soon as he could do so without giving offence he would return to his ivory tower.

It was during one of those visits to Paris that Montaigne had made the acquaintance of one of the most famous bluestockings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—a certain Mademoiselle Marie de Jars de Gournay. Montaigne seems to have been quite impressed by this learned woman and, being old enough to be her father, he adopted her as a sort of honorary daughter, a *fille d'alliance*. He remained in correspondence with her during the rest of his days, and shortly after his death, the lady, duly chaperoned by her mother, travelled all the way to Bordeaux that she might express to Madame de Montaigne her deep regret at the demise of her never-to-be-forgotten husband.

Not only did the widow of the famous man receive Mlle de Jars de Gournay most graciously, but she also presented her with annotated copies of her late husband's works, both in manuscript and in printed form. The faithful adopted daughter, not to be outdone in her devotion to the memory of her adopted father, then set to work to give the world a perfect edition of the famous *Essais*, with all the quotations correctly translated and made ready for public consumption.

As I pointed out a moment ago, Montaigne will never be very popular among our average readers. The essay form which he invented is the favourite literary dish of all true connoisseurs, but mention the word 'essay' to a publisher and he will turn pale, pull his watch out of his pocket, claim that he has got just five minutes in which to catch his train, and that is the last you will see of him until he is definitely informed that you have left the city and have returned to Connecticut. Don't blame the poor man. Essays mean only toil and trouble to all connected with



MONSIEUR MONTAIGNE ARRIVES IN A FISHING-SMACK

True enough! At that very moment we heard the voice of Rabelais, who was in a state of absolute fury and who was apparently berating a third person.

"*Tais-toi, Gargantua,*" we heard him shout. "Keep quiet, you monster, did you hear me? I told you to keep quiet. You have caused me enough trouble as it is. I never knew such a day! You have behaved like a badly spoiled child. I am angry with you. I am very angry with you and I don't like you at all!"

Thereupon there followed an outbreak of such weeping and moaning and wailing as none of us had ever heard, and a sad, woebegone voice begged to be forgiven, protesting that no harm had been intended and that everything had been done in a spirit of good, clean fun.

"I know your good, clean fun, my little cabbage, but you have been a most damnable nuisance. And for that, you cannot come in, but have to stay outside all night long! Besides, this house would not be big enough for you. So go away—leave us in peace—at least for a little while, and don't bother us any more. I gave you a cold boiled ostrich for your supper before we left. Unless you have already eaten it—and I told you not to—it still must be in your knapsack. Take it and eat it. That will quiet your nerves. After that, leave me alone, I say, for the love of God—*leave me alone!*"

"Then you are no longer angry with me, dear master?" the giant whimpered.

"No, I am no longer angry with you, but only if you promise that from now on you will be good. If you give me any more trouble, I shall leave you at home the next time I go out, and I shall take Pantagruel."

"I will be very good," Gargantua humbly promised.

"Then go away! *Fiche-moi le camp!* Disappear!"

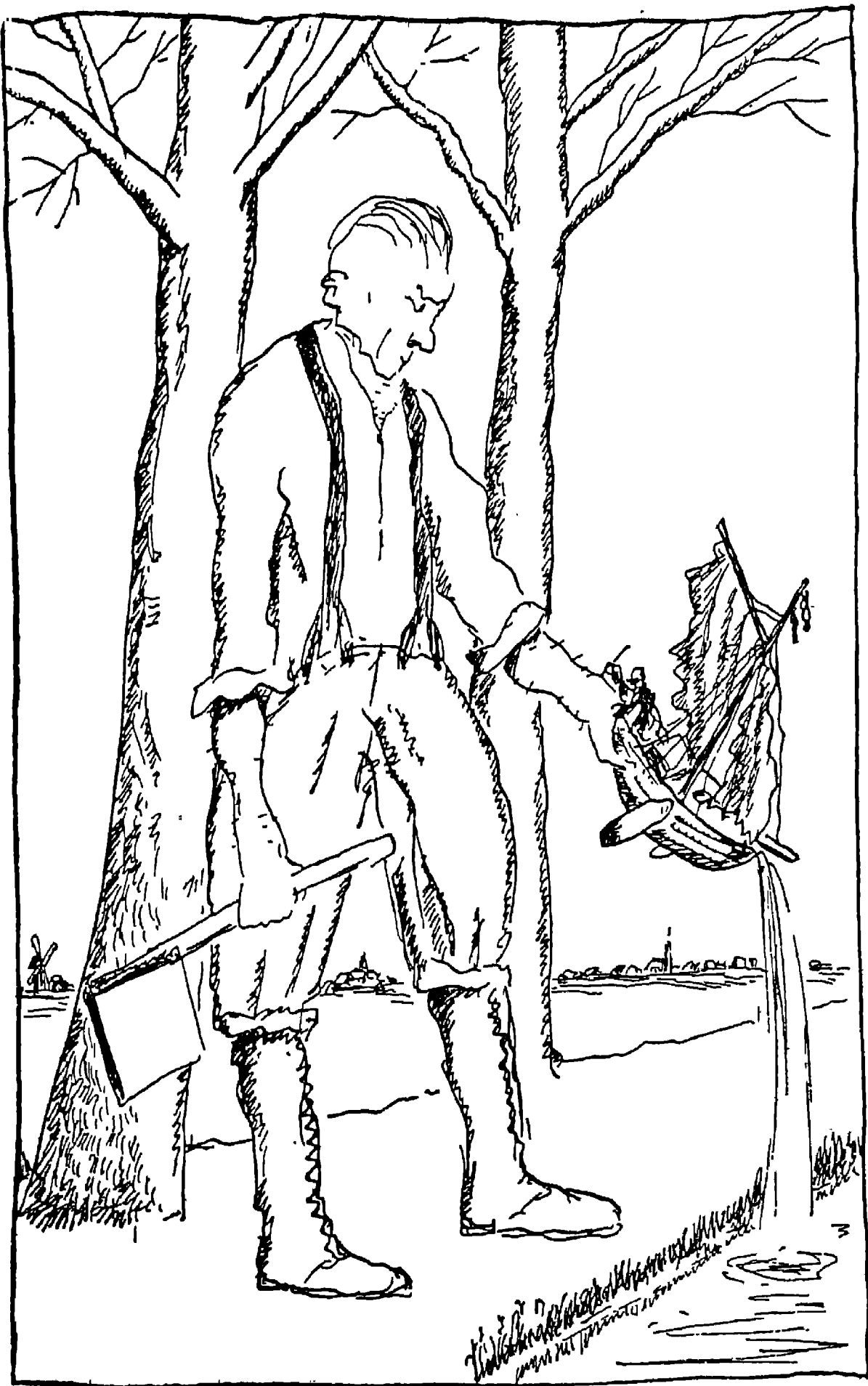
"Yes, master."

Rabelais entered and, without bothering to shake hands with any of us or giving us so much as a look, he slumped down upon the nearest chair, rubbed his knees, and said with a gesture of despair, "This is absolutely the last time I shall let that idiot accompany me. Every time he promises me most solemnly that he will be good, and always it is the same story.

"You see, these giants are very faithful. They are not very bright, but they are extremely loyal to their masters. Now it so happened that there were some other giants abroad to-day, and not only giants but dwarfs too, and the dwarfs came upon us in such hordes that they were much more dangerous than the giants. These dwarfs and giants, so I have been told, belong to an Englishman, a certain Meester Sweeft, if I got the name correctly. He lived a century and a half after me, and I think he was a



THE LILLIPUTIANS AND THE BROBDINGNAGIANS WERE AFTER GARG.



PAUL BUNYAN HAD PICKED UP A BOAT THAT HAPPENED TO BE  
SAILING THROUGH A NEAR-BY CANAL

"Where have I seen that face before? Now, where have I seen that face before?"

No sooner had Frits said, "Dr Rabelais, this is Desiderius Erasmus," than it was the turn of the Frenchman to go through some of the same sorts of antics displayed but a moment before by his pet giant. With much greater agility than one would have expected of a man of his age he threw himself on his knees right before the greatly embarrassed Erasmus. Then he took the old humanist's hands into his own and carried them tenderly to his lips.



RABELAIS GREETES ERASMUS

"My father," he said, "my revered and deeply beloved father, who is also my mother, the one man in the world to whom I owe more than to anybody else. And so at last I am to meet you!" and he actually wept tears of joy.

All this apparently came as a complete surprise to Erasmus.

"It is undoubtedly flattering to my pride," he began, "to find a stranger bestowing such honour and affection upon me, but I fail to see why I deserve this act of homage. Come on, my good sir, sit down. Sit down quietly by my side and tell me why you feel like that about me. A father? Yes, I suppose I might have been some one's father, but a mother? Even by the widest stretch of the imagination, that is carrying things a little too far, isn't it?"

"I know," Rabelais answered, recovering from his outburst of enthusiasm, "but if only you could feel what you have meant to me! I first

How much harm these experts had done to what used to be called a civilized form of living we realized once more during that evening while listening to the talk of Erasmus, Montaigne, and Rabelais. Of these three, Erasmus had been the only one who might have remotely qualified as an expert, for he had been a professional teacher, but only for a short while and not long enough to let his mind become petrified. As soon as he had resigned from his pedagogical duties, he had taken up literature and thereafter had roamed contentedly up and down the slopes of Mount Parnassus, but without any definitely fixed place of abode or any definite purpose. Rabelais had been a theologian and a physician and a private secretary before he became a writer. As for Montaigne, he had done about everything a human being could hope to do. He had been suckled by a peasant woman and had ended his career as the personal friend and trusted counsellor of a king. He had had practical experience within the realm of government and was well versed in all those subtler qualities of life one can only learn from one's women friends. Only after he had tasted of every experience within the reach of mortal man had he settled down to become an author. Therefore, that evening we had with us three out-and-out amateurs or, to use a word that is even less popular in our modern world, we had with us three complete dilettantes. I wish we had been able to make a record of what was said, but we had to observe the rules of our silent agreement. Besides, there was no electricity in Veere, and a recording machine would have been out of the question.

As soon as the first part of the meal was over—a most excellent dinner, by the way, and just the right kind of music for the taste of our guests—we steered the conversation in the general direction of politics and, with the assistance of Erasmus, who seemed to have guessed what we were driving at, finally reached a point where we felt that we could risk a definite question. It was Frits who asked it: “Who will ever give us a formula by which we can hope to live like civilized human beings and not like animals in the jungle?”

Both Rabelais and Erasmus bowed to Montaigne as if to indicate that he was the one to give us our answers. He poured himself another small glass of Châteauneuf and said, “I would, if you don't mind, like to hear some more of that music of the young Austrian you played a little while ago. It was most pleasing and soothing, and I can think better when I am listening to soft music. The habit has probably stuck to me from my childhood days.”

I gave the message to Jo, who relayed it to Hein. We heard the machine being wound up, and then the voice of Elisabeth Schumann came down to us in the familiar *Voi che sapete*. Montaigne smiled and said, “My dear friends, the answer to that question, what is the right formula for

Montaigne let these remarks go by without any comment and continued his inquiry in the same quiet manner in which he had begun. "It is a fine system," he said, "at least from a theoretical point of view. Everybody has always agreed that it was the best system. The other day I read about a Chinese philosopher who seems to have lived hundreds of years before the great Plato, and this is what he said, if my translation is correct: 'Let him who is best qualified be in command of his fellow-men.' Plato, the most learned of all the ancient sages, did likewise. So did Socrates. So did the great Aristotle. So have all the wise men done who since then have given the matter their serious thought. 'Let him who is best qualified be in command.' And what have they actually accomplished?"

"Not very much, I am afraid," said Erasmus.

"That, my honoured master," said Rabelais, "is stating the case very mildly."

Then Frits made bold to enter into the conversation. "If that is so, monsieur," he asked, "then what solution do you offer?"

Montaigne shrugged his shoulders with that gesture to which we were rapidly becoming accustomed. "I don't know," he said. "Except that maybe, like so many other problems in life, there may be no solution at all."

Now Erasmus took the floor, figuratively speaking, for once he was comfortably tucked away in his chair, he would hardly move during the entire evening.

"If you will allow me, Monsieur de Montaigne," he began, "and you, my reverend Doctor, if you will allow me to offer a few observations? I never laid claim to any deep sense of piety, but I tried to be a fairly good Christian and, as long as I lived, I was a faithful son of the Church. And while young I had a certain amount of training as a theologian and so perhaps I can speak with some authority. At least, I shall not be far wrong when I quote from Holy Writ, for I know my Scriptures.

"Monsieur de Montaigne told us that we need not wait for still another political prophet to tell us how we can obtain a reasonable and righteous form of government, and we all agreed with him. That point having been decided, we only need devise a workable and practicable method by which we shall be able to find that man who is best fitted to rule and then give him his chance. The difficulty, as I see it, is not in finding that man, for people of extraordinary ability are so rare that they soon enough attract our attention. But how can we arrange matters in such a way that we can get him elected and do not see his place being taken by some one of infinitely inferior abilities but who, for one reason or another, appeals more to the popular taste?

"And now I want to be a little more serious for a moment than I usually am. Let us forget about politics and statecraft for a moment. Let us



he asked in a low voice, "If all of us are in full agreement upon this subject and if it is as simple as all this then why have we never seriously tried to do just this?"

"Haven't we ever?" Rabelais asked. "Not even for a moment?"

"Undoubtedly, a few people have tried to do so now and then and here and there, but their efforts never lasted very long. And what I meant was this: why, if we are all of us convinced that salvation lies only in that direction, then why have not all of us endeavoured to obey that law everywhere and all the time? What answer have you to this, Monsieur de Montaigne, and you, my other dear friends?"

"Alas," Montaigne replied, "once more I feel obliged to answer that I do not know." As for the rest of us, we said nothing, for there was nothing to say.

At that moment the clock struck a quarter before twelve, and all of us realized that soon we would have to bid each other good-bye. I looked at Frits, and Frits looked at me. It had been another evening of great and good friendship and perfect understanding. We wanted to explore that question a little further, but we feared that it was too late, and Rabelais, who for quite a long time had given signs of increasing nervousness, spoiled all further efforts at conversation by getting up and asking to be permitted to have a peep outside our door.

"It is not raining, my dear Doctor," said Frits, who had just looked at the weather.

"It is not the rain that worries me, but I am afraid that I was perhaps a little too hard on my poor Gargantua. He does mean so well, only—like most giants—he is so incurably stupid. But no one was ever more faithful or more loyal."

With that he opened the door, and there was Gargantua, lying right on the cobblestones with a couple of trees he had torn out of the ground as his pillow. He was not asleep. His eyes were wide open and firmly fixed on the door of Frits' house, very much like those of a Newfoundland dog which has been waiting outside for his master.

"Well, my poor little one," Rabelais said, his voice almost trembling with kindness, "and have you been a good boy after I scolded you?"

"Master, never have I been so good in all my life!"

"And you had nothing to eat or drink all the evening long?"

"I have had nothing to eat. But when I got thirsty, I tried to take a drink out of the harbour. Such horrible stuff! It tasted like brine. It made me choke. So when I saw a little tin cup full of water standing just outside the village, I drank that."

"Good Lord!" said Jo, who had come forward to have a good look at the giant, "so that is why the water in the sink has stopped flowing!"



MONTAIGNE WALKING PAST OUR ANCIENT CHURCH

And Now a Rather Strange Combination—EMILY  
DICKINSON and FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN—But Emily  
Has the Time of Her Life, and Chopin Shows  
Us What Can Be Done with a Minipiano

**F**RITS," I said next day at lunch, "what do you know about American poetry?"

"Very little. The usual stuff, *Moby Dick* and Walt Whitman."

"Well, *Moby Dick* is not exactly poetry. I don't really know what it is, for I never have been able to get through it. Walt Whitman too is not one of my favourites. But did you ever hear the name of a certain Emily Dickinson?"

"Dickinson? Emily? No, never heard of her."

"You've missed something."

"What's all this leading up to? Do you want to invite the lady for dinner next week?"

"I would love to. Unless you have a better candidate."

Lucie came in from the kitchen. She had been making *sauce rémoulade*, for we were having cold meat, and *sauce rémoulade* was one of her specialities."

"Did I hear you talk about Emily Dickinson?" she asked.

"Yes, you did."

"I know all about her. Don't you remember? You sent me a book about her a few years ago—the last time you were in America. I loved her poems! Strange bits of sound, they were, but entirely original. I liked her immensely!"

"There now!" I said to Frits. "I have found some one who agrees with me! You tell him about Emily, Lucie."

"I don't know that there is much to tell except that she wrote a most fascinating kind of poetry. She never bothered about either rhyme or metre and I don't think you can compare her verse to anything in any other language. But it was fascinating stuff and entirely new. I would love to meet her."

"I have already thought of that," I told Lucie, "and I would arrange it that way if I only knew how to ask you. I am always afraid that if we do something that is not entirely according to the rules—and what are those rules?—we may find that we can't have any more guests. I think that it was understood that only Frits and I were to be present. Of course,

who had lived all his life in Paris and who had always 'enjoyed a delicate constitution,' and the simple and unsophisticated daughter of a New England country lawyer, who probably had never been aware of what she was eating, was rather complicated. It had to be a very neutral meal, but with the help of Jo, whom we found still washing her dishes from the night before, we solved it in a few minutes' time.

On this occasion we should not be obliged to go in for strange, old-fashioned dishes, for the people we had asked were our near-contemporaries, and so a *potage santé* was quite in order, for there was no reason



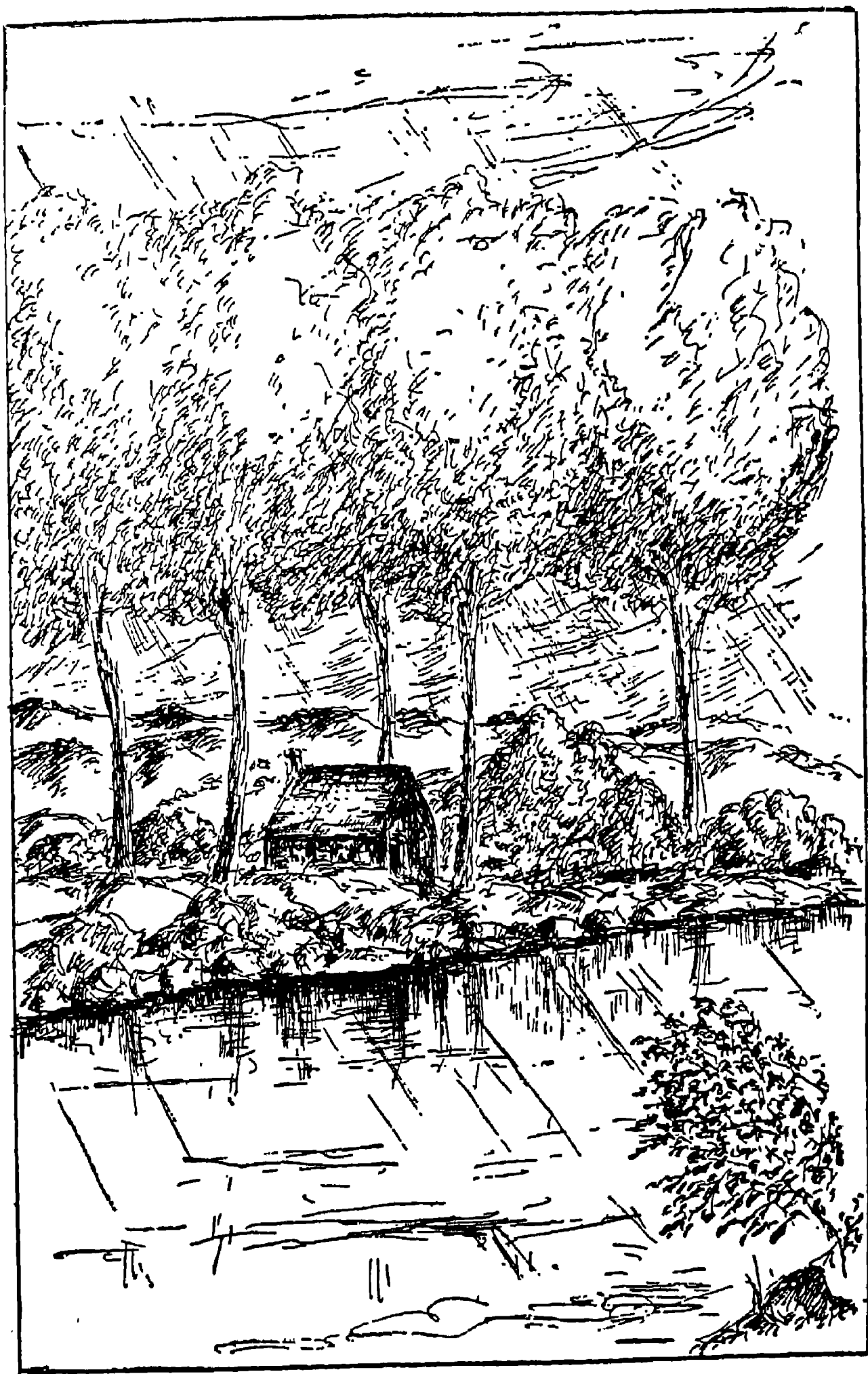
OUR KITCHEN

why Emily should not like sorrel soup, and it would be good for Chopin's weak chest, as sorrel is supposed to be very healthful for whatever ails you. After that a plain roast chicken with mashed potatoes and cauliflower *à la polonaise* (for the benefit of Chopin) would undoubtedly satisfy both parties. At Jo's suggestion, we added a dish of our everlasting string beans. "Cauliflower is too risky," she warned us. "You know what it does to most people."

"You're telling me!" I answered, and the string beans were duly noted down on Jo's shopping list.

The dessert, too, was easy. Jo promised to make us a good old-fashioned bread-and-butter pudding with a lot of whipped cream. As for wine, Emily was sure to drink only water, and Chopin could finish the case of Châteauneuf that had been left over from the previous Saturday.

Should we have music? There is a problem that always presents itself when you are entertaining musicians, for as a rule they are not only exceedingly positive in their likes and dislikes, but also very outspoken in their criticisms, should anything fail to please them. Emily, we knew,



THE EARLY NEW ENGLAND SETTLERS HAD FOLLOWED THE RIVERS

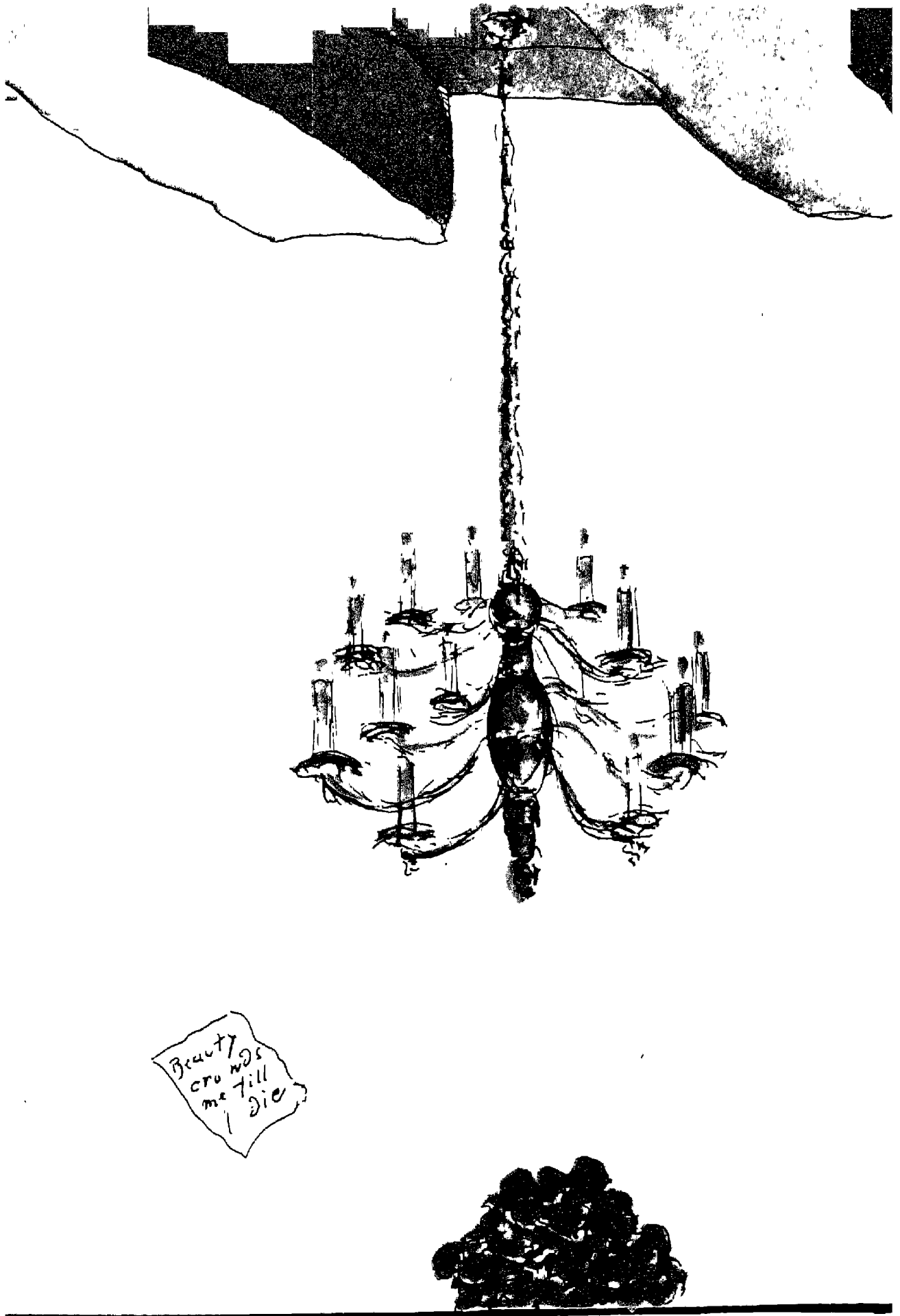
her own hope for a perfect union. That, at least, is the official and accepted version of the incident which fits in most beautifully with the novels about queer spinsters in ungainly calico dresses who never again were seen by anybody "after Ebenezer had left the farm to marry that city gal." (Lucky Ebenezer!)

I have no more—and certainly no better—information upon the subject than anyone else. But from the secret testimony of Emily's own poems, I would come to a somewhat different conclusion. I once discovered a curious religious institution in a remote part of the Austrian Alps. I never got inside, of course, but I derived my knowledge from a woman who had visited it. She told me that all the inmates of this nunnery, the moment they took their vows, were presented with a small doll, a regular child-Jesus doll, which thereafter they could dress and wash and array in the finest garments that could be bought in the Vienna silk-shops. The nuns themselves were never seen again, for, being supposed to be completely happy where they were, there was no reason why they should ever return to the wicked world that lay outside. But some of their dolls were preserved in a small museum in the near-by village, and these were shown to the public.

To Emily Dickinson her poetry was such a child-Jesus doll. She was so bright and understood herself so well that she must have known how totally unfit she was for the business of living a normal life in the community into which she had been born. For generations the girls of her class had been brought up to believe in something which they called (if ever they dared to speak about it at all) "a pure passion." They might as well have gone in search of a heatless flame.

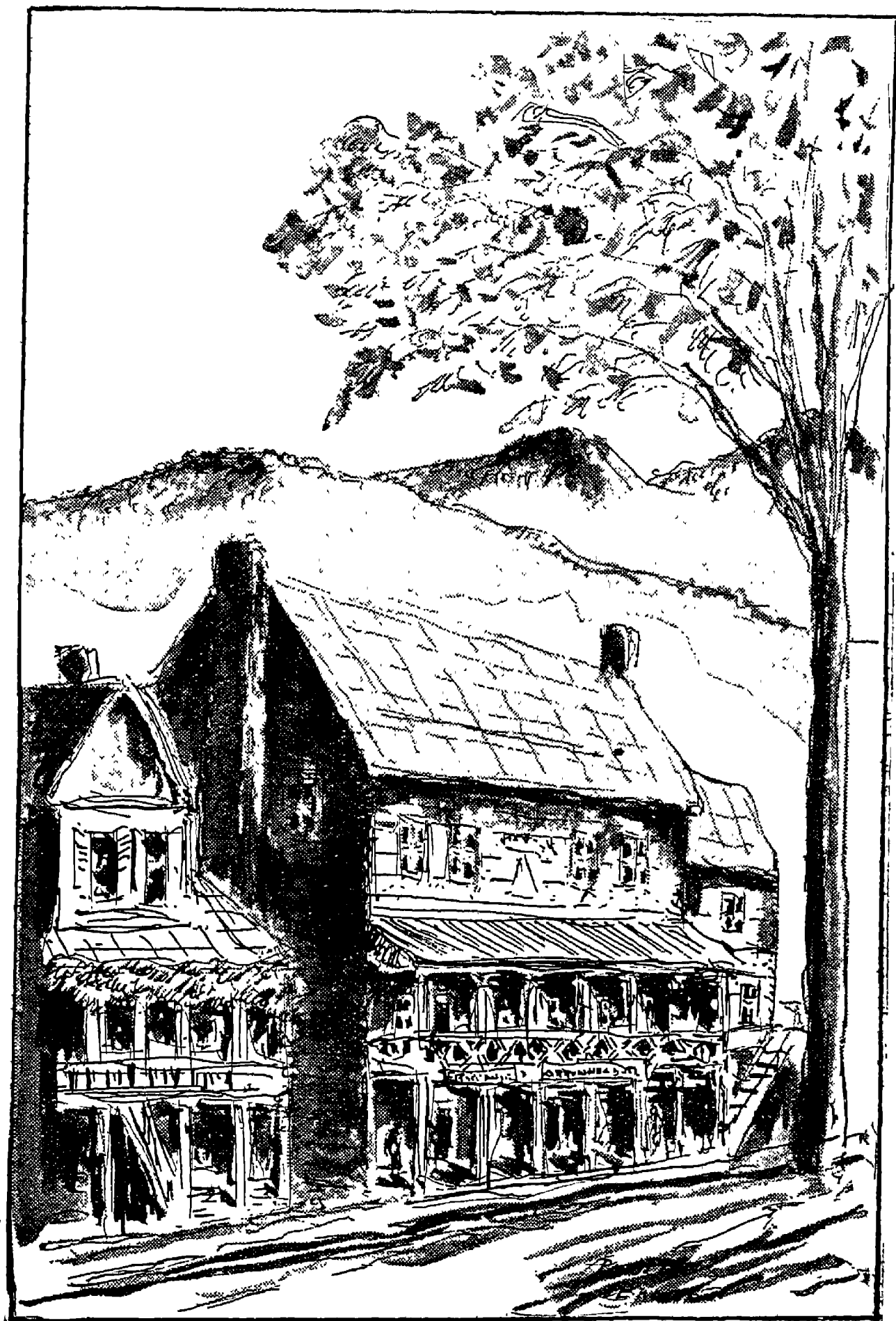
It is true that flames can cease to give out heat, but only after they have been extinguished. Most women of Emily's social antecedents humbly accepted their fate because their ministers and the Good Book had taught them that the rôle they were supposed to play in the scheme of things had thus been ordained by God, and who were they to question the wisdom of the Almighty? Emily Dickinson's relations towards her God were rather particular. They included the right on her part to ask whatever embarrassing questions she meant to put up to Him, and if the good Lord did not come forward with a prompt and satisfactory reply, she herself meant to supply it.

By birth and breeding Emily was a life member of the Pure Passion League and she knew that she would never be able to escape from her own background. Being also a very great artist and therefore insisting upon perfection, she refused to engage in any kind of activity at which she would never be able to excel. If this were so, would it not be much wiser and much pleasanter to spend one's days as a highly amused spectator



A BIT OF PAPER HAD COME DOWN THROUGH A CRACK  
IN THE CEILING

[See page 558]



A QUIET COUNTRY INN SOMEWHERE IN MASSACHUSETTS



As he departed this life only five years ahead of his son, Nicolas also had the satisfaction of knowing that he had begotten a genius. For Chopin's life, in spite of a great many difficulties, was on the whole a very successful one. This may have been due to two causes.

Frédéric Chopin was undoubtedly the greatest composer for the pianoforte the world had seen. But other artists, painters, composers, and architects have been equally prominent within their own fields of endeavour, yet have died in the same poverty in which they had been condemned to live. It is not difficult to guess the reason for their failure. They had missed out on two qualifications which had set Chopin apart from the rest of his colleagues. In the first place, he was the only genius produced by the Polish race while it was struggling for its existence as an independent nation, and in the second place, he had a unique chance of standing forth as the living symbol of a lost cause.

The other musicians who did not fare as well as he did were Austrians among other Austrians or Italians among other Italians or Dutchmen among the usual run of the Dutch. They could never hope to become the embodiment of all that was glamorous and heroic among a people in exile. By this I do not mean to detract one single F sharp from the assembled works of this unequalled teller of musical tales. I owe him as much of a debt of gratitude as anyone else who in moments of desperation has found consolation in listening to one of Frédéric Chopin's nocturnes. But without their lost cause and the opportunity to impress themselves upon the rest of the world as the incarnation of all the hopes and aspirations of a nation which had the sympathy and admiration of every civilized human being, neither Frédéric Chopin nor our beloved friend, Ignace Paderewski, would ever have attained those heights of fame they finally attained. Peace be to their ashes, and may they soon find a worthy successor to inspire the rest of us with a love for that utterly adorable, if at times completely exasperating, people known as the Poles.

There is very little sense in my repeating here the outstanding facts in Chopin's musical career. You can find them in every encyclopedia, and they are very simple. The boy played the piano before he could read and write. That piano, by the way, was used for kindling-wood by the Cossacks when they suppressed the Polish revolution of 1863, for that was the way in which the Russian usurpers usually gave expression to their interest in the cultural achievements of their subject races. At the age of six little Frédéric began to compose. His father not only recognized his son's uncanny abilities but he refrained from doing what so many other fathers in similar circumstances have done. He did not exploit his offspring as a musical prodigy, but neither did he threaten to break every bone in his body unless he gave up the idea of becoming a famous piano

Chopin's music completely answered the needs of the concert-going audiences while his Polish passport opened the doors of all the most worthwhile homes of the capital.

In Poland events took their normal course. Russian gallows were being erected at all cross-roads, and the Polish insurgents were in full flight. Soon Paris was chock-full of refugees. Most of them were as poor as church mice and lived in the slums. But a few of the great feudal families had anticipated what was going to happen and had carefully provided for the day when they could no longer dwell on their ancestral estates. They now used Paris as the centre from which to prepare their counter-attack. Being well aware of the value of publicity, they meant to use every possible opportunity to prove to the world that as a race the Poles were infinitely more cultured than their Russian oppressors.

Overnight young Chopin had become exhibit No. 1 of Polish civilization. Rarely has any artist or author (and you cannot start a successful counter-revolution without either) lived up quite so magnificently and so satisfactorily to what was expected of him—or quite so easily and naturally. For Chopin at that time had all the necessary qualifications to become a popular idol. He was young and very good-looking, but in a delicate sort of way, so that people instinctively felt sorry for the poor boy whose shoulders were already bowed down with grief over the fate of his unhappy fatherland. And when he played one of his own compositions and was so deeply moved by the music that he had to ask some one else to finish it for him—then the tragedy of Poland ceased to be merely something the people had read about in their newspapers. Then it became so real that those in the audience felt like taking up their muskets and rushing to the defence of their beloved Polish friends. But ere they could do this, the jubilant strains of a mazurka or a waltz had broken through the gloom that had settled down upon the hall, and everybody went home feeling that the cause of Polish freedom was not yet lost, that it never could be lost, that Poland would arise once more in all its ancient glory.

It was long before propaganda in the modern sense of the word had been invented. But Chopin and his music were the best propaganda a desperately outraged patriotism ever had. I wish to God he would come back to us now!

Of course, as the years went by and nothing happened and the world (which has such a very short memory) began to forget the bestialities of the Romanovs in Poland and wherever else they set foot and the bestialities of the Habsburgs in Italy and all the other bestialities which, these last two hundred years, have been an unavoidable part of what Europe used to call its "foreign policies," Poland too began to bore people and next it dropped out of their minds altogether. Not that this affected Chopin

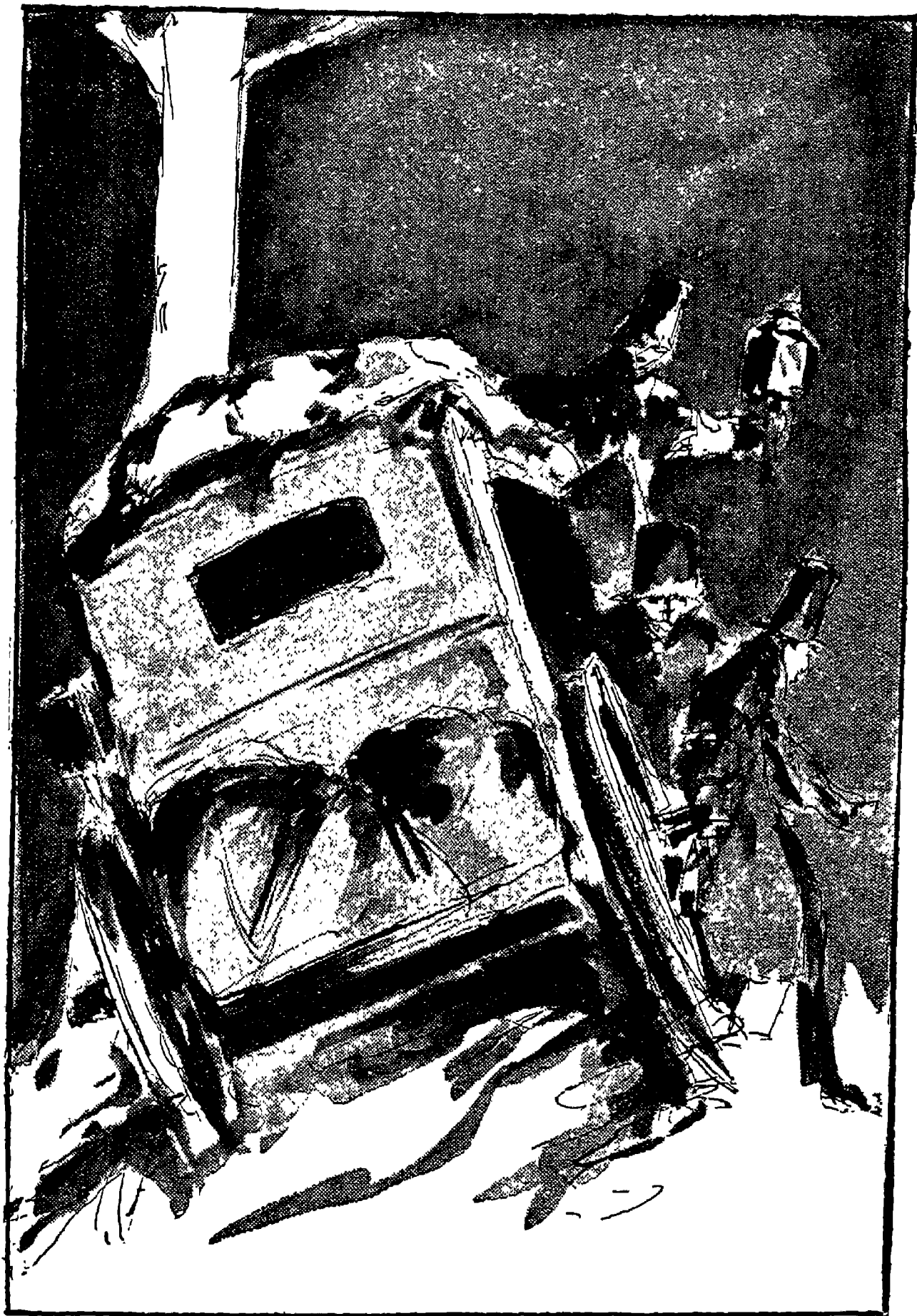
disembarked at La Palma, it was Spain, and Spain at its worst, and you were right back in the Middle Ages. There was no hotel in the Majorcan capital. There were no apartments. There was no food fit for human beings, especially those accustomed to the cuisine of Paris. And everywhere you were hounded by suspicious officials. When you sent to Paris for your piano (for her dear Frédéric must go on with his work and must write even more beautiful things than before) it took the customs people six months to allow it to pass. Why should anyone in Majorca want a piano? It looked queer. It smacked of revolution. And when you fell sick and coughed your head off, there was no doctor on the island, but the officials, suspecting that you might have caught some queer kind of pestilence, forced you to leave the city and to withdraw to a home in the country, miles away from everywhere, in an old and damp monastery, where you added bronchitis to your other troubles and almost died of them.

Chopin, however, must have been tougher than he looked. He not only survived Majorca, but also the tender care of his Lucrezia, and he returned to Paris and lived for a good many years to come.

On the whole, these last ones were not very happy. Paris was rushing from one revolution to the next. News from Poland grew increasingly bad. And in those circumstances teaching—even at twenty francs a lesson (an unheard-of price in those days)—was apt to become an intolerable labour. Besides, that bronchitis of Majorca seemed to have come to stay. Chopin was beginning to lose a good deal of blood and often he was so weak that he could hardly move. But he needed money and, like Paderewski in his last days, he painfully dragged himself to his piano-stool, that he might make a few more pennies to pay other people's debts and help his poor country, but most of all that he might continue to live up to his reputation of being a really *grand seigneur* who never turned down a request for some slight assistance on the part of a fellow-patriot and who would have starved to death before he confessed that he himself had not had anything to eat during the last three days.

Chopin died on October 17 of the year 1849. At his funeral, Mozart's Requiem was played, together with his own Funeral March from the Sonata in B flat minor and, after that, two of his preludes, the E minor and the B minor. A silver goblet, filled with earth from his beloved fatherland, given him by his friends when he left Poland for good in the year 1830, descended with him into the grave, together with the withered rose Marie Wodzinska had given him when she still hoped that her father might relent and would allow him to marry her.

To-day all the actors in this drama are dead and gone. Nothing remains



IT WAS CHOPIN WHO WAS COMING OUT OF THE BROKEN  
TRAVELLING-COACH

this room and meet a lot of strangers. I shall go upstairs—I saw a light there, and there must be some place where I can sit. You can bring me my supper up there and I shall need very little, for I am not at all well and now I bid you a good-evening.’ And before we could stop her, she was gone—lickety-split—up the stairs, two at a time, as if some one had been chasing her. Then we heard her turn the key of your door and also heard her laugh a little, and after that, not another sound.”

At that moment Frits finally arrived. He had been obliged to go to the post-office to mail a special-delivery letter, and that was how he had missed all the excitement. “Never mind,” he said, “the rest of us are here, and if Emily feels that way about it, she can have her supper upstairs, and we shall have just as good a time. So won’t you please take a chair—all of you—until Jo is ready?”

“Yes,” said Jo, pointing to her kitchen, “but how about the fellow in there?” and then, catching a glimpse of her stove, she used a well-known Dutch expression no Dutch woman is ever supposed to use and cried out, “Didn’t I tell you! The creature is actually stirring up my gravy!”

This seemed to be carrying things a little too far for a stranger who had not even been invited, and Frits, waxing a bit hot under the collar, shouted out, “*Eh, vous lâ-bas, monsieur!* What are you doing?”

The fellow in front of the fire turned around sharply, then recognized our guest, threw both his arms around him, and joyfully called him by his name. “*Frédéric, mon cher Frédéric! O, que c’est bon de te revoir. Tu vas bien?*” and Chopin, dropping his serious mien, cried back, “Well, of all people! Dear Papa Rossini! Imagine meeting you again after all these many years!”

Thereupon the two men, the older and the younger one, once more embraced each other most affectionately, until Chopin remembered where he was and, turning around, said, “My unknown hosts, this is my dearly beloved friend Signor Gioacchino Rossini, and a very great artist he is, too.”

“You mean he was, my dear Frédéric,” Rossini answered, “but before we do anything else, let me explain why I am here. I am, I assure you, not in the habit of going to places where I have not been invited. Therefore, I am not here as your guest and I shall not enter your dining-room, even if you should ask me to do so. I came here because I had to.

“You see, we sometimes hear about certain things that are happening in the world of the living. When I was told that old Johann Sebastian had been entertained by you, I felt very sorry that I had not been here too, for I had always wanted to meet him surrounded by his sons, some of whom, I am afraid, have gone to the other place. A little later, Herr van Beethoven complained that he had left his hat and a very valuable



ROSSINI WAS POKING AROUND AMONG JO'S SAUCEPANS

There's a certain slant of light,  
On winter afternoons,  
That oppresses, like the weight  
Of cathedral tunes.

I reached across the table and handed it to Lucie, who had been watching me. She smiled and put the piece of paper in her lap, picked it up once more, smiled again, this time pointing at Rossini, and returned to her own thoughts.

The nocturne came to an end, but, without waiting for us to catch our breath, Chopin went off into his famous Mazurka in A minor. I wondered what effect that would have upstairs, but I did not have to wait very long. Another smaller piece of paper came fluttering down. It contained only one line:

I measure every grief I meet.

The mazurka stopped with a loud final chord, and Chopin was off on his Barcarolle. This time I had to wait a little longer, but again a bit of paper was being pushed through the crack in the ceiling. And now Emily had written:

To stay the homesick, homesick feet  
Upon a foreign shore.

I judged from the way Chopin finished his Barcarolle that this would be his last piece, but by now he had warmed up to his task, and there followed his Ballade in F minor. To which Emily answered:

Beauty crowds me till I die.

After his ballade Chopin got up. "Could I have another cup of coffee, please, madam," he said to Jo, "and perhaps a small glass of cognac? I feel rather exhausted. It is so long since I touched the keys of a piano."

"You might give me one too, for I never tasted it," came a voice from a little higher up on the stairs. "Monsieur Chopin played so beautifully that he made me thirsty."

"Of course," said Jo, now again in control of the situation. "I will bring it up to you in a jiffy."

"Oh, don't bother to do that," Emily begged her in a voice as sweet as honey. "It would be too much trouble. Besides, you might spill some of it. That would be a waste, and we must never waste anything!"

"Then perhaps you had better sit down here," Lucie invited her. "This is a very comfortable chair, right by the fire, and you can go upstairs again as soon as you have finished your coffee."

But Emily did not go back to her safe retreat until a few minutes before it was time to go. For with one thing leading to another, we had a more hilarious evening than on any previous occasion. It appeared that Chopin

sat down at the mini to play an obbligato to Rossini's sanctimonious exhortations.

Meanwhile, it had rapidly grown later, for clocks have a habit of going twice as fast as usual when you are enjoying yourself. Chopin's travelling-carriage, repaired by our village blacksmith (who most obligingly had left his warm bed to fix up the broken wheel), was waiting for him in front of the door. We had only a few minutes more. Lucie was sitting in front of the fire in eager conversation with Emily while Chopin and Rossini had withdrawn to the kitchen for a final cup of coffee and brandy. Erasmus was placidly dozing in his chair, and Frits and I were standing by the table, congratulating each other upon the success of our latest dinner-party.

A few minutes before midnight, Lucie took Emily upstairs to help her with her layers of shawls and scarves, and then we bundled our three guests into the big old coach. Suddenly all of us found ourselves singing *Auld Lang Syne*, but the clock struck the hour of twelve, and the coach rapidly disappeared round the corner of the market-place. As we went back into the house Lucie stopped me and said, "You owe me a new lipstick. Emily borrowed mine, but she never returned it."



"But think of my house," Frits warned. "There'd never be room enough for such a mob. Fifteen or twenty is all we could possibly pack in."

"How about hiring van Beveren's hall, where they repair the buoys in spring," Lucie suggested, "and inviting them all? You need not ask every one of the Hamelin boys and girls. I suppose a dozen or fourteen would be enough, and five or six from the Children's Crusade and a dozen or so of our own village children to make the others feel more at home."

That settled next Saturday's party.

We asked van Beveren whether we could have his place for a Sint Nikolaas party for the children of Veere (deeming it wiser not to mention the others), and then we set to work to make it such a party that our unhappy little guests would, for a while at least, forget the terrible things that had happened to them on earth.

Jo was in her element. She knew exactly what we should give this sort of guest. "It will probably be a cold night," she said, "what with the weather we have had so far. It will probably snow. I will therefore start them on Dutch pea-soup. The Doctor is for ever telling me about the pea-soup his mother used to make. I don't see why I can't do just as well! After that, the kids would love some kind of croquettes. They always do—croquettes seem to mean a party to them. Chicken croquettes, if I can get enough chickens, and otherwise plain veal croquettes. And, of course, there must be ice-cream, but for such a crowd you will have to order it from Middelburg, for I am afraid that my freezer is not big enough. And *speculaas*! Lots of *speculaas*. I can easily make that too, if I begin early enough. And oranges and apples and candy and those things you call 'pistaches.' You must remember them—we all had them when we were children—but only at very nice parties. They were small rolls of coloured paper with a funny cap inside and a funny poem and something at which you would pull and then it would go off with a bang."

"Crackers," Jimmie translated. "We call them crackers or favour-holders in America. I never had many of them as a child. My people were too religious to let me go to parties."

"Fine, and paper snowballs, for we won't have to clean up the mess. Van Beveren can do that. And a real Sint Nikolaas and a real Zwarte Piet with a rod for the bad children and presents for all those who have been good."

There followed a very busy week, and I think we had much more fun preparing everything than the children did when the party took place. Especially Jimmie, who used to get terribly fidgety unless she had something to do and who now could drive all day long between Middelburg and Veere to buy everything we needed. As for Frits, he thought it was so much fun that he telephoned his office in Amsterdam that he would

2 pig's feet  
 500 grams fresh sausage or 50 grams butter [1 lb. sausage or  $\frac{1}{10}$  lb. butter]  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  pint dried peas  
 4 quarts water  
 A bit of salt  
 4 leeks  
 A handful of celery green  
 1 heart of celery

Wash the peas and let them soak overnight in the cold water. Next morning let them simmer over a slow fire for about two hours, until they are thoroughly boiled, but be careful to proceed slowly. Then pass everything through a sieve and add the pig's feet. Let all this boil another hour. Then take the sausages, into which you have previously pricked a great many holes with a fork, and let the whole mess boil once more for about half an hour. Then take the sausages out, until fifteen minutes before serving, when you put the sausages in again, for they are to be eaten with the soup. Then add the vegetables, which in the meantime you have cut up into small pieces, and let everything boil over a slow fire until the meat has separated itself from the bones. In case you think it necessary, you can, from time to time, add a little water, and the soup will be ready as soon as it is no longer in any way lumpy.

That was the recipe. It was a bit complicated and indicated that our ancestors had more time than we, but Jo told us not to worry. She could easily fix it that way.

As one large bowl of that soup was the equivalent of a three-course dinner, we had now provided for the grown-ups as well as for the children and we dropped our plan of giving them chicken croquettes on top of it.

Thursday morning at breakfast I had an inspiration. Frits had now met several Americans and had found them very pleasant company. Why not ask another American to be with us on this particular evening? Some one who had been known to be fond of children—some one like old Benjamin Franklin, the most civilized American of the eighteenth century, the man whose ready wit and common horse sense had charmed and delighted young and old, kings and peasants—everybody who came in contact with him.

It was rather late to send him an invitation. Not that he would in the least mind being asked as an afterthought. He was not that type of person. But I had not the vaguest idea through what formalities my little slips of paper had to go before they were acted upon. Well, it would do no harm to try, and that evening the wobbly stone lion of the town hall was balancing itself on a slip of paper which bore the name of Benjamin

dignified old age to which he was most assuredly entitled, he had started forth upon still further adventures and had so greatly impressed every one he met with the vigour of both his body and spirit that many people suspected him of having learned the secret of the life everlasting from his friends, the Indians of the Pennsylvania hinterland.

Ships had improved considerably from the days when his father had first crossed the ocean, but an ocean voyage during the last quarter of the eighteenth century was still far from comfortable, and the chances of reaching one's destination were always doubtful. Just the same, when the call of duty came, old Dr Franklin was not found wanting and, with his young grandson as his secretary, he sailed for France in search of those funds which were absolutely necessary if the cause of the rebellion were not to collapse through a lack of ready cash.

Arriving at last safely in Paris, but without the slightest idea how he would be able to pay for his board and upkeep, Franklin not only succeeded in getting in touch with the French Government, but he actually persuaded this already bankrupt concern to sink fifty million francs (which it did not have) into a cause that seemed about as hopeless as that of a free Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the last World War.

That was a pretty long sentence, but it sums up the whole situation in less than thirty words. At home, Congress was weak and without sufficient power to enforce its will upon the thirteen colonies, which often hated each other more cordially than they did the common enemy. The soldiers of General Washington were so sadly lacking in the daily necessities of life that they were seriously thinking of going back home and accepting any kind of peace rather than prolong a struggle which offered no possible expectations of victory. As for his colleagues, the other representatives of the sovereign United States of America, who were now wandering across the face of Europe, entrusted with mysterious diplomatic missions, they were so completely lost in their own little plans and ambitions and so hopelessly jealous of each other's success that they spent more time sniping at their Parisian colleague than trying to get those cannon and rifles for which General Washington's starving and freezing volunteers were clamouring with never-diminishing insistence.

To make the picture of his disillusionment perfect, Franklin's only surviving son (upon whom he had set such high hopes) had turned Tory and had joined those who opposed the war against his own country. His wife, with whom he had spent a great many placid and contented years, was dead, and he himself was suffering from that most painful of all maladies, gall-stones.

But Franklin never uttered a word of complaint. Once he had set foot on the soil of France, he proceeded to do what he had set out to do with

At such moments I have perhaps wavered a little in my devotion to that other great patriot, Mr Thomas Jefferson, of Albemarle County in Virginia, whom I always considered the leading figure of the Revolution, for I felt that I could bestow just as great an affection upon this old man with his plain face (but elegant manners), his quaint speech (hiding a profound knowledge of the English language), his shambling gait (but with feet that would unerringly carry him to his ultimate destination). Yes, there have been moments when I could actually have loved old Ben, the printer and mail-carrier, the diplomat, and one of the half-dozen men directly responsible for the founding of our independent republic.

The sentiment just expressed was by no means shared by all Dr Franklin's contemporaries. Those who based their position in life on inherited privilege, those who lived upon the labours of others, those who hoped to get a great deal in return for very little beyond the fact that they had taken the trouble to be born—all of them most cordially detested and feared this dangerous revolutionary rabble-rouser who had tried to deprive the Penn family of their legitimate revenues, who had helped to bring education within reach of every one by substituting English for Latin as the main object of a gentleman's education, and who had actually preached the pernicious doctrine that candidates for office should be appointed according to their abilities rather than the social and economic status of their families. And all these Tories and reactionaries had called Ben Franklin a Red and a Communist (or whatever was the eighteenth-century equivalent of these words), who was perhaps not without a certain talent but who must be kept in his place, no matter by what means.

But where was the right place for a man who had started life as one of a brood of thirteen children of an impecunious if honourable Boston soap-boiler who (horrible thought to most of his neighbours!) had not only been a recent immigrant but also a creature suspected of nonconformist leanings—and that in a Boston still dominated by the old Puritan theocracy? And how could one hope to keep a person within the bounds of social and economic respectability when at the age of twenty-six he had already established himself as the leading printer of the thirteen disunited colonies and had attained such a degree of financial independence that the threat of withdrawing a contract merely made him laugh and might even provoke him into telling you that you had better try elsewhere, for he never again meant to set a line of type on any job you intended to entrust to his care?

In addition to all these reprehensible qualities, the upstart seemed to have been endowed with a very pronounced flair for science, so that (in spite of his never having gone to a respectable college like Harvard or

renown as one of the real founders of that experiment in self-government which soon may become the last surviving stronghold of democracy and therefore the only hope for a better and more human kind of world.

Kant's far-reaching *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared while Franklin was in France. He may have read it and he may not. He did considerable travelling through Germany, but he never, as far as I know, visited Königsberg. It would have been nice if we could have arranged an evening at which these two interesting men would have had a chance to exchange and expound their views. I even thought for a moment of including Immanuel Kant in our Sint Nikolaas festivities, but I hesitated to invite a professional philosopher to a children's party. Children are apt to ask such embarrassing questions!

Our Sint Nikolaas party, I am delighted to say, was an unqualified success. We had asked Lucie and Jimmie to come and help us, for while we could take care of the little boys, they would know much better than we what to do with the small girls, and we had no idea whether Virginia Dare had lived to a ripe old age or had died in infancy. When she came she proved to be only seven, for having been adopted by an Indian family, she too had succumbed to 'a complaint of the chest' (tuberculosis, of course) when the rest of the tribe which had murdered her parents and her fellow-settlers had fallen victims to that dreadful disease.

Lucie and Jimmie and Jo had gone straight to the big meeting-hall, where Erasmus too had promised to come. But Frits and I were still at his house, busily engaged upon the not so easy task of changing his actor friend into something resembling a *bona fide* bishop of the fourth century of our era. Poor Frits, who was not familiar with the difficult art of blacking up, had by this time got so much more black on his shirt than on his face that we were obliged to take him out into the garden to get him <sup>clean</sup> and we had rather stupidly forgotten to watch the clock, until we were suddenly called back to reality by a loud voice which demanded to be informed whether he was at the place where he was supposed to be or whether they expected him somewhere else. It was Benjamin Franklin who had walked in on us and who now stood in front of our open fire and was looking at it with eyes that expressed everything but approval.

Without waiting to be introduced, he poked his cane into the burning pieces of firewood (big logs were not to be had in Veere for love or money) and then said, "My dear young men, don't you see what you are doing? You are wasting half of your heat. More than that, I would say. It may be as much as three-quarters. Now if only you would move the logs up a little farther forward and put a curved iron plate behind the fire—but

Whereas in those hamlets the jundos were usually run by a small clique of Hotchkissons and Wedderburns, eminent Philadelphians whose fathers or grandfathers had stolen themselves rich, cheating one another and the poor Indians.

"When the Revolution began, these families somehow hoped to become the king-pins of the new régime. They never looked any farther than their noses, and most of them were snubnosed. But they made the mistake of their lives when they called in George Washington to save their necks from the English hangmen.

"Old George, bless him, came to Cambridge and gave them one look, and after that he treated all these little potentates like the dirt under his feet. Of course, he too was a good deal of an autocrat. He loved to be called Your Excellency and to act the part. I am a plain man and don't go in for that sort of nonsense. But in spite of all that, I honoured old George. He was a great man. But then, all those slaveholders had an air of 'Yes, my good fellow, and what is it you want?' I suppose it was because they always had had so many Negroes hanging around them, ready to do their bidding. There was only one exception. That was Tom Jefferson. A nice youngster was Tom, and brighter than the rest of us put together. And now let me see"—holding up his candle. "Just as I thought! Your cellar is all wrong, but it can easily be fixed. Let me show you . . ."

But I never discovered how Frits' house could be made as dry as a bone, for Jimmie was yelling to us from the top of the cellar stairs that if we did not want to be much too late for our party, we had better come up right away. So we climbed the stairs, and I introduced Mr Franklin to Mrs van Loon as a fellow-Pennsylvanian.

"And where were you born, my dear madam?" asked old Benjamin, giving her a bow which showed that he had not wasted his time at the court of Versailles.

"In Harrisburg, sir," said James, who rarely sirred anybody.

"Harrisburg? Let me see. That is where old John Harris had his ferry, wasn't it? I knew John when I first came to Philadelphia. And so that village became a town afterwards?"

"It is the state capital now," said Jimmie, with more pride than I had ever seen her take before in her native city.

"That shows that the people of Pennsylvania have at last got a little sense. After the way the Philadelphians let the General's troops starve that winter in Valley Forge, they no longer deserved to be the capital of a civilized community. And look at what they did to my poor academy! The moment I was looking the other way they turned it from a free school for the poor into a Latin hothouse for the



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN INSPECTS OUR CELLAR

In his right hand he held a light birchwood stick, and underneath his left arm rested a large book, the volume from which the Saint would read the good and evil deeds that the children had committed during the previous twelve months.

The head of the procession had almost reached the place where Erasmus was sitting, when the door opened, and a very small boy on crutches came in. Jimmie went up to him and asked him kindly who he was and what he wanted. The little boy seemed very much bewildered, as if he felt that he had done something he should not have done. Then, wringing his felt cap with both hands, he suddenly burst forth in tears and buried his head in her skirt.

"Please, gracious lady," he pleaded, "please don't send me back!"

"Of course not," Jimmie assured him, "of course we won't send you back, but we can't let little boys walk all over the village so late at night and all alone, so tell me—who are you and how do you happen to be here?"

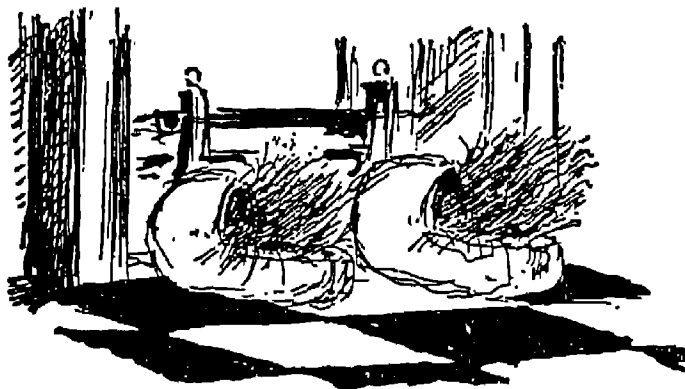
He wiped his eyes with the back of his rather grimy hand and then he said, "My name is Johann, and I am from Hamelin. You see, I was the small boy who could not keep up with the others because I had to use crutches. And so I never got into that mountain, for the doors were closed just when I reached it, and I lost all the fun the others had, and then they never came back, and I had no one to play with afterwards, for they were all of them inside the mountain and none of them were ever seen again. I have been so terribly lonely all my life long, and the fathers and mothers of the others hated me because, as they told me, I used to remind them of their own children whom they had lost. Sometimes they even beat me, although I had done nothing bad, and I heard that some of the other boys and girls would be here to-night and I wanted so much to see them," and he broke forth into such a deluge of tears that Jo, who was somewhat better suited for such maternal activities than either Lucie or Jimmie, picked him up in her arms and carried him over to the other Hamelin children, who at first looked at the lonely boy as if they could not believe their eyes and then, shouting, "*Johann! das ist unser lieber, kleiner Johann!*" took him by both hands and, regardless of his crutches, dragged him into a wild roundelay which was so contagious that the others at once followed suit and joined in the fray.

The maestro, who was a quick-witted fellow, immediately caught the spirit of the occasion. Dropping his march, he switched over into an old-fashioned polka and, by this stroke of genius, turned the hall into a complete bedlam in which Benjamin Franklin hopped and skipped between Jimmie and Jo until everybody had joined except Erasmus, who sadly shook his head when Lucie invited him to dance with her, but who immediately afterwards changed his mind and performed a *pas seul*



in its stable, enjoying the hay which the children had left for him in their wooden shoes which they had placed at the foot of their chimneys the night before. That had been very thoughtful of them, and he was happy that he had come to a village where all the little boys and girls were so nice to animals.

Then a short pause. Or was he mistaken? Had some of them perhaps not been quite as good as they should have been? Here the Veere small fry exchanged knowing glances. Some of them began to look far from comfortable. How much did the Saint know? Could he possibly have found out about that time they had broken a window in the dominie's house while playing ball in the street? And how much could he have learned about that other occasion, when they had stolen pocketfuls of a



THE WOODEN SHOES, FULL OF HAY FOR SINT NIKOLAAS HORSE,  
STOOD IN FRONT OF THE FIREPLACE

neighbour's apples? Of course, when they were alone they told each other that there was no Sint Nikolaas—that he was really a grown-up with false whiskers and was merely made up to look like a real bishop. All the same, one never could tell, and now he had opened that big book and was beginning to read from it in a most solemn voice.

Well, first of all, he had heard that one of his young friends—although he perhaps was a little older than most of the others—was for ever complaining about being cold and that he had expressed a wish for a sweater that would really keep him warm. Since he, Sint Nikolaas, lived only to make everybody happy, he had decided to give him a sweater in which he would be able to brave a winter at the North Pole. Now if Master Erasmus would please get up and accept the little parcel Sint Nikolaas had brought him, then he might therein find something he had always wanted, had always very much hoped for.

At this, Erasmus, looking more delighted than he could have done on that famous occasion when he received his gold medal from the Pope, arose from his chair and walked up to the Saint, who handed him a large bundle done up in all sorts of gaily coloured ribbons and addressed to

Nikolaas made a very gracious speech about bright little boys who loved to fly kites, and Benjamin Franklin got up and received his gift.

Jo was next. She was asked to step over to the small side-room where Erasmus had put on his sweater. There she found a beautiful new gas stove for her own kitchen which Frits and I had bought for her. We felt that we owed her something a little better than what we might have given her in ordinary years, for without her, our dinner-parties would never have been the success they had become.

Jo thanked Sint Nikolaas most effusively for his most generous present, for that is something you are allowed to do. You may thank the Saint, but there must be nothing personal in your expressions of gratitude.

Then Black Pieter felt it was his turn to take a hand in the proceedings. He suddenly opened his burlap bag and with a quick gesture threw handfuls of candy among the children. By this time, the little murdered princes had so completely lost their shyness that they rolled as merrily across the floor as the others, and there was a free-for-all which ended in the usual fight when the two smallest of the Veere girls had got hold of the same stick of peppermint at the same moment. Hein settled this controversy by lifting them up as if they had been ill-behaved puppies, and peace and harmony once more returned to the hall.

The grown-ups had now been taken care of, and the time had come for Sinterklaas to open his big book to find out which of the children had been good enough during the previous year to deserve being remembered and which should be spanked with Black Pieter's birchwood rod. We had somehow feared that some of our small foreign guests might not quite understand this part of the ceremonies and therefore we had slightly changed this chapter. Sinterklaas merely studied his pages for a few minutes and then remarked that, as far as he could see, they had all of them been pretty good. He therefore would leave it up to them to decide what he should do.

"All of you get up," he commanded, "and now tell me—on your word of honour and cross your heart—have all of you been really good enough to deserve some kind of present?"

The Dutch children answered for their foreign friends.

"Ye-s-s, ye-s-s! Sinterklaas," they shouted in unison. "Cross our hearts and hope we die! We have tried awfully hard to be good." And the little Dauphin got so carried away by the noise they made that he too clapped his hands and said, "*Oui, monsieur l'archevêque, j'ai été un très brave garçon!*"

"And you feel that none of you deserve to be spanked?" the Saint continued.

A thunderous "No-o-o-o-o!" followed this question.

And what happened after that? I am sorry, but I feel that that should remain a matter about which the world had better not know too much. For the end of the evening was filled with so much sadness, it was so full of unconscious tragedy, that I would rather not talk about it.

No, nothing very startling occurred. The children ate until they could hold no more, but they behaved like lambs. Then Benjamin Franklin told them stories about the time he had been in the army and had fought in the American wilderness and had met real Indians (when he mentioned the Indians, Virginia Dare looked quite proud and very superior), and our newspaper friend, who had once more discarded his regalia and had been duly introduced as another guest just arrived, performed some wonderful tricks with eggs and with burning candles and bowls of water that were suddenly filled with gold-fish, and the maestro played all his jolliest tunes on his accordion, and then the boys and girls, although they did not know a word of one another's languages, sang lots and lots of songs, and Jo arranged them in two groups—the boys on one side and the girls on the other—and taught them a number of old-fashioned Dutch kissing games. And then, as if they were obeying a silent signal, the children suddenly grew very sleepy—and that is when gaiety left us and tragedy walked in.

For those poor little mites seemed to feel that very soon they would have to bid each other farewell and by this time they had grown so fond of each other that they did not want to say good-bye. The little Veerenaars had not quite known in the beginning what to make of their strange-looking friends in their outlandish costumes. But they had soon sensed that there was something mysterious about them—that they had gone through certain experiences which had left deep marks upon them—and where (so they whispered to each other) were their fathers and mothers and why couldn't they play like the other children, but had to be encouraged to laugh and to be gay, as if they did not quite understand that they were allowed to dance and be happy to their hearts' content? Why, in the middle of one of those lovely games, where at the end you were allowed to kiss your partner, had they looked with such frightened eyes at the doors as if somebody might come in and hurt them? Why, whenever a plate or a cup had fallen, had they stiffened up as if expecting a sudden blow? And because, childlike, they had felt that those other boys and girls lived in a constant dread of some terrible calamity, they had tried to reach out to them by being very nice to them—much nicer than they ever were to each other—and though they would stoutly have denied it if one had been tactless enough to tell them so, they had actually wrapped little scraps of love around the thin shoulders of their small comrades.

But from their side, too, the Lost Children had undergone quite a change.

## CHAPTER XX

### FRIDTJOF NANSEN, JAKOB VAN HEEMSKERK, WILLEM BARENTS, and SURGEON DE VEER Are Our Visitors on a Very Cold Night in December

**W**E happened to be talking about the heroes of our childhood days. During the last months we had met so many strange people—famous men and women who had made their mark upon history—that the subject was bound to come up sooner or later.

Both Frits and I were well aware of the small esteem in which our own world held the 'exceptional man' and how his place had been taken by the 'average man' as the centre of public interest. We had often discussed the problem with our guests and had found that all of them agreed with us that a world without adequate and forceful leadership would never succeed in setting the human race free from the slavery of its own fears and ignorance. Not being entirely blind to the things that were happening around us, we also understood why the exceptional people were enjoying such a bad Press. In a world filled with the unpleasant noises of a Hitler and a Mussolini, wildly shrieking their belief in their God-given missions and giving loud expression to their hatred and contempt for everybody and everything else, one did not like to hear anything more about 'leadership' than could possibly be helped.

"But," as Frits asked quite sensibly, "what do these noisy fellows prove? Of course, they are terrible people, these Duces and Führers. I detest them. I have seen them at work and I loathe them. But what in God's name do they prove? Only one thing. That they are the wrong heroes and the wrong leaders. It also shows—and very painfully—that we ourselves were flabby and weak because we refused to take them seriously and let them get as far as they have got. We were so busy with our own little affairs—we were fighting so desperately among ourselves for more plunder and for more colonies and to decide which politician or labour leader should run the show—we just had to close our eyes to what all of us knew was coming. And I think that all our indifference was owing to our own lack of good leadership. It was old Gresham's law repeating itself for the so many hundredth time. Bad money, unless you watch it like a hawk, will drive out good money, bad manners will drive out good manners, bad music will drive out good music, and bad heroes, unless you get rid of them in time, will drive out good leaders. I apologize for this sermon. We have threshed all this out before—Plato—Confucius—

trinity of thirty years before was no longer taken seriously by most members of the younger generation, I had little love for that philosophy of Myself and Nothing Else which had replaced it. Half a century of digging among the ruins of the past had made me painfully familiar with the feet of clay which were buried deeply in the sands of time and which only too often supported the magnificent superstructure of some of the statues erected to our departed gods and half-gods.

But, on the other hand, where should we have been—yes, where should we be to-day—unless occasionally there had been feet of granite, willing and able to carry their owners into the realm of the unknown and find new roads towards progress? The answer was—nowhere at all. We needed those *voortrekkers*, as our South African cousins used to call them. We needed a few stout hearts to do the pioneering. Without those men and women who trekked ahead of the rest of the crowd and either found new grazing fields or died in the attempt, no one of us would ever have got very far. We should have been obliged to stick to the swampy coastal regions, where we had lived and died until then, since the beginning of time, and we should never have known what lay hidden beyond the distant mountain ranges.

To-day, of course, the physical world has been thoroughly investigated and opened up, but that was only a beginning. In spite of all our marvelous technical achievements, we are still cave-men riding around in little gasoline-driven cars. It is true that we now can soar like the birds, but as long as we still behave towards each other with the brutality of wild animals, we might just as well have stayed where we were. The entire realm of what I would like to call 'the human decencies' still remains to be conquered. And in order to give our youngsters the courage needed to continue the work of spiritual exploration, we must show them what some of our physical heroes have been and what they have done. Otherwise (and here old Gresham is back with us again), for lack of good and dependable and trustworthy leaders, the youngsters in their despair may feel tempted to follow the phony heroes who have now got such a hold on their imagination. For youth can no more live without some kind of hero than it can without its daily supply of fresh air and vitamins.

That very morning something in the newspapers had once more brought all this back to my mind and in very vivid terms. For years the youth of Germany had been organizing itself into so-called 'suicide squads' which had undertaken to conquer the Swiss mountains once again, but this time by routes which all honest mountaineers knew to be impassable. However, for Führer and *Vaterland* these poor idiots must do the impossible. Never mind if they were sure to lose their lives in the attempt.



MOUNTAINEERING, THE NOBLEST OF ALL SPORTS



THE HOSPICE OF ST BERNARD AMID THE ENDLESS SNOWS OF WINTER

We had continued to talk along this line for almost the whole of the rest of the afternoon and, in the end, we had decided that we would do what we had been talking about earlier in the day. We would invite a few of the heroes of our youth. I had made a bid for Fridtjof Nansen, the great Norwegian explorer, and Frits had asked to be allowed to ask three men, known to every Dutch child—Jakob van Heemskerk, Willem Barents, and Surgeon de Veer, the leaders of the famous Dutch Arctic expedition of the year 1596.

It was easy to think up a meal for these guests. They had been simple folk, not accustomed to elaborate fare. I shall ever remember that enormous jar—almost a small-sized barrel—of mutton which I had seen standing in the galley of the *Fram*, the last time I was in Oslo.

I have always detested mutton with a most particular horror, but apparently Nansen and his comrades had lived quite happily on a regular diet of seal and, as an occasional delicacy, a bit of this embalmed mutton. Just one or two very small lamb chops—well, those I could tolerate if they were served with a sauce that hid their sheepy taste. But that enormous tin can holding what seemed to me fifty pounds of preserved mutton—it had given me a very clear insight into the hopeless monotony of that endless voyage of those occupants of the *Fram*. And knowing something too about the fare upon which the early Dutch polar explorers had subsisted I felt that almost anything we might serve our guests would be welcome.

Which, of course, did not mean that we, as hosts, should be deficient in the care with which we prepared our meal. But it would be better to keep everything as simple as possible, and this is the menu I gave Jo for the coming Saturday.

First of all, there was to be a bean soup, made according to a recipe of our own Gouverneur Morris, a gentleman of the old school who owed a great deal of his success as a statesman to his knowledge of good food. Here is that recipe as it was given to me by one of his descendants.

#### *Bean Soup à la Gouverneur Morris*

Put two cups of beans to soak in water to cover at night. The next morning put them into a pot with one teaspoonful of salt and two quarts of water. Bring to the boil and simmer slowly for an hour. Then add six carrots, two turnips, and one parsnip, scraped and cut into small even pieces. Let the soup simmer for three or four hours, skimming when necessary. When the vegetables are soft, press the whole through a colander and return to the pot. Scrape and cut four stalks of celery into small pieces and add to the soup. Let simmer until



tender. If the soup gets too thick, add enough boiling water to make of proper consistency. Cut four slices of bread into small pieces, toast, and turn over and over in butter. Pour the soup over this and serve.

After that, just plain, ordinary roast beef, prepared in the regular Dutch style, with a lot of vegetables on the side and plenty of gravy. For dessert, one of Jo's excellent puddings with raspberry sauce and large cups of coffee and all the fresh fruit we could get. There is nothing that makes quite as much for good conversation after a pleasant meal as lots of fresh fruit and an abundance of nuts and candies of all sorts. Not to forget the large jar of ginger which these last two hundred years has always been found on every respectable Dutch dinner-table after everything else has been removed.

Music or no music? Would our guests care for it? Jimmie doubted. Frits was neutral. Lucie thought in the affirmative. Then I remembered something else I had noticed on board the *Fram*. In the long room I had seen an old-fashioned musical-box, one of those tinkly affairs that was worked by means of a metal cylinder and that played three short tunes—three Norwegian melodies.

A few of my readers may remember these curious contraptions from their childhood days—those absurd ka-plink-ka-plankety-plunk thingumbobs, endlessly repeating *Ach, du lieber Augustin*, *Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, and *Yankee Doodle*. That (or rather the Norwegian equivalent of these popular melodies) was all the people of the *Fram* had had to break the monotony of their long polar nights. All the same, that absurd musical-box had served its purpose. When the silence of the eternal snows had become unbearable, these plinkety-plank tunes had given them the relief they needed to prevent them from flying at each other's throats for some trifling act or word.

I knew, however, that Nansen had been a man of wide cultivation, and any of Beethoven's symphonies would have done for him, except that Beethoven symphonies are not exactly the sort of music one usually serves with the soup. And I thought that it might perhaps be better to start with a few short pieces of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of them was Johann Kuhnau's 'Biblical' Sonata called *David and Goliath's Combat*, of which I had had a private recording made one evening when Castagnetta was playing it for us and when she had made David throw his sling-shot with more than usual vigour. For the benefit of the Dutch skippers I added Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck's *Fantasia in Echo Style*, a piece full of tricks and queer tonal effects but admirably suited to the taste of honest sailors of four hundred years ago. That and Johann Pezel's *Fünf-stimmige blasende Musik* would probably be

sufficient. Should they want more, we had by this time such a collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century melodies that we could not possibly run short.

Then for Frits' benefit I wrote a short story about the lives of our heroes.

Fridtjof Nansen. The very name depicts the man. It stands out like a Norwegian mountain peak rising abruptly from the snowfields at its base.

Nansen was born near Oslo in October of the year 1861. He went to the local school, did a lot of ski-ing, and finally enrolled at the University of Oslo to study zoology. He did a lot more ski-ing and at the age of twenty-one joined a sailing-vessel that went to Greenland, getting in this way a bit of first-hand information about life on the ocean and his first glimpse of the Arctic.

After his return to the civilized world Nansen continued his studies, got the inevitable Ph.D., and began to prepare for one of the most fantastic of all polar voyages, at least from the point of view of the late eighties of the last century. He decided to travel on snowshoes and skis from the east coast of Greenland to the west coast, so that at last there would be some definite knowledge about the interior of the great white continent. Together with Otto Sverdrup (who afterwards was to command the *Fram*), two other scientists, and two Lapps, he sailed for Greenland in May 1888. In August these men disappeared from view and climbed to the top of the frozen plateau which is the roof of Greenland. After six weeks of trekking through this snow desert at an altitude of almost nine thousand feet, the party safely reached the west coast of Greenland, from where it returned to Norway in the spring of the next year. The problem of Greenland had been settled, and the name of Nansen as a most efficient leader of a polar expedition had been established.

In 1890 Nansen was ready for another walking trip, but this time he was a great deal more ambitious. First of all he intended to build himself a vessel sufficiently strong to withstand the pressure of the polar ice, for he knew that most previous voyages had come to grief because the vessels that had been used had been smashed like walnuts under a giant's heel. Having got hold of such a craft, he would thereupon entrust his floating fortress to the same Arctic current which had carried relics of the ill-fated American *Jeannette* expedition all the way from the New Siberian Islands to the coast of Greenland. First of all he would take his ship to these New Siberian Islands (where the *Jeannette* had foundered, just north of the mouth of the Lena River) and would let nature take its course. If his calculations were right, the vessel would drift pretty close to the Pole and if it should be found that it did not get quite as far northward as he

hoped, he intended to hop off at the nearest point to latitude 0 and do the rest of the voyage on foot. Walking and ski-ing and climbing had always been his favourite sports, and a couple of hundred miles more or less meant very little to him.

Nansen explained his plan to his Norwegian colleagues and laid it most respectfully before the Royal Geographical Society of London. Without exception the old-school Arctic explorers told him that it could not possibly be done, and, greatly encouraged by their doubt, Nansen returned to Christiania (Oslo to us) and began making preparations for his voyage.

He had a ship specially built, with its sides constructed in such a way as to withstand ice-pressure, and called it the *Fram* (*Forward*). Then, as now, money was the beginning and the end of all scientific expeditions. But for this once, the Norwegian Parliament (not unaware of the publicity value of such an undertaking) felt inclined to do something to help the good cause along, and the rest of the funds were obtained from the king and a few private individuals.

Otto Sverdrup, Nansen's companion during the trip across Greenland, was chosen to act as master of the *Fram*. Nine other men, consisting of officers, sailors, engineers, and stokers, were put under his command. These Norwegians had been most carefully selected, for it takes not only extraordinary physical strength but tremendous will-power to live rationally through so many years in the Arctic, and Nansen figured that he would need at least three years to reach the coast of Greenland.

In June of the year 1893 the *Fram* slowly chug-chugged out of Oslo Fjord. Late in September she was fastened to an ice floe near the New Siberian Islands, and the famous drift began. In March 1895, two years after she had left Norway, the *Fram* reached her highest latitude. During all this time, not a single square inch of land had been sighted, but constant soundings had proved that the Arctic Ocean was much deeper than had been expected, sometimes going as far down as two thousand fathoms.

Finding that the northward trek of his ship had definitely come to an end, Nansen decided to make his dash for the Pole. As it would not be possible for him to locate his ship in the drifting ice, he told Sverdrup that he would make for Spitsbergen as soon as he had succeeded or had failed in locating the Pole. For his companion he chose the strongest man on board, one with the not-unusual Norse name of Johansen.

On March 14, 1895, the two pilgrims, with their dogs, sledges, skins, and kayaks, left the *Fram* at 84° N., 102° E. (look it up on your atlas), and on April 8 they reached 86° 14' N., the nearest spot to the Pole ever before reached by anyone not a bear or a fox.

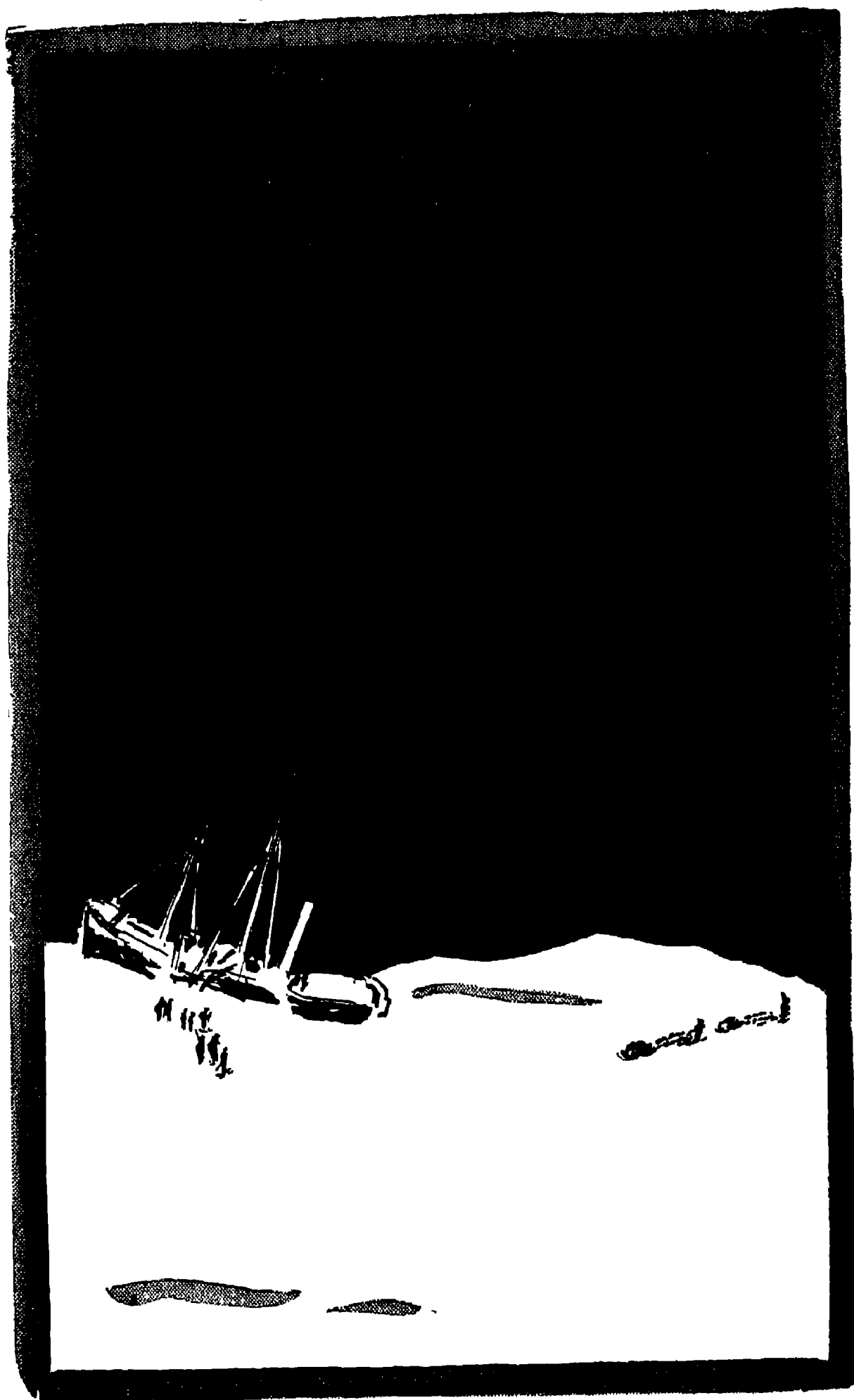
Nansen was primarily a scientist, and, since he was not provided with

a contract for a syndicated story of *My Dash to the Pole*, he was a free agent. He realized that if he wanted to return to Franz Josef Land before it was too late he must return at once. And so, within easy walking distance from the Pole, he turned his back upon the object of his desire, which in itself showed greater strength of character than is found in most explorers.

After heartbreaking months spent in the trackless icy wilds surrounding the Pole the two men finally reached the northernmost island of the Franz Josef group. There they built themselves a small snow house, using their silken tent as a roof, and made ready to pass the winter in about as much discomfort as any two human beings have ever experienced for quite such a long period of time. Their food consisted of bear and walrus meat, cooked over a blubber lamp, but somehow they managed to keep alive, and never did they know a day of sickness. Late in the spring of the year 1896 they packed their few remaining belongings on their backs and moved southward.

And now, you will ask, what did all this mean to me and why was I so much interested in the adventures of these two wanderers?

In the year 1896 I was fourteen years old and beginning to outgrow my first hero, the famous minstrel of a Dutch boys' magazine who could do all things and do all of them well. I badly needed some one else to worship—some other outstanding personality who would fill my lonely soul with awe and admiration and who would make me feel that the drab and unimaginative existence of a small and unimaginative Dutch town was not the beginning and the end of existence. And there was this magnificent-looking Norwegian (I was a shrimp in those days, lean from many years of sickness, and very bad at sports and none too good either at my school-work), and he and his few companions were somewhere up there—away up north—lost among the endless snowfields of the Arctic. Perhaps they were still alive. More likely they had long since died from hunger and cold, for this was the third year since they had been last heard from, and not a single word had trickled down from the great frozen spaces able to give us the slightest hint about their ultimate fate. Being endowed with a certain amount of imagination and having since early childhood read every book on polar expeditions I could lay my hands on, I could paint myself a pretty accurate picture of the last days and hours of these intrepid explorers. The truth about the ill-fated Franklin expedition had only revealed itself in my father's days, and he still remembered the shock of horror that had swept across the civilized world when it was discovered that every one of that crew of a hundred and twenty-nine officers and men of Sir John Franklin had starved to death, long after they had reached the coast of northern Canada. Being familiar with all the pictures that



NANSEN LEAVES THE "FRAM"

had been published of the cairns (hiding the last news of the *Erebus* and the *Terror*) and the pots and pans containing the remnants of human bones (for in the end it had become a case of sailor eat sailor), I could now see the men of the *Fram* as they struggled bravely towards the safety of the south, devouring their last dog and finally attacking and killing each other.

And then, in the early part of August of the year 1896, there arrived a brief telegram from Vardö (I shall never forget the name of that little town near the Murmansk peninsula) telling a jubilant world that Nansen was safe and that he and Johansen had been found near Franz Josef Land by an Englishman named Jackson, who had gone to that distant island on a scientific expedition financed by the late Lord Northcliffe. Just in the nick of time, too, for they were on the point of starvation. But they were safe. They were even then on their way to the Norwegian capital in the yacht *Otaria*, which they had boarded on leaving Jackson's good ship, the *Windward*, at Hammerfest, but they were full of anxiety about their comrades on the *Fram*, from whom not a word had been heard these last three years.

They could not know it, but on that selfsame day—August 13, 1896—the *Fram* had at last set itself free from the ice floes of the north and was now peacefully sailing southward with every member of its crew in perfect health. A few days later at Tromsø, the old shipmates were once more united and were proceeding to Christiania and to such honours as never before had been bestowed upon a group of men who had long since been given up as lost.

I had lived through all those episodes as if I had been an actual participant in those magnificent adventures, and as soon as Nansen's *Farthest North* had been translated into Dutch, I got hold of it and though I did not understand most of the scientific data with which the two volumes were crammed full, I missed none of the dramatic incidents leading up to that morning when Nansen, realizing that the end was near, had suddenly heard a shot, had climbed to the top of a small knoll of ice, and had found himself face to face with a white man—Frederick Jackson in search of his daily seal steak.

After that I had lost sight of Nansen for a great many years. I knew that he had continued his scientific career and that he had taken part in a great many other and rather important expeditions, studying ocean depths and currents and suchlike matters which afterwards became embalmed in very dull scientific publications, but in the year 1905 his name once more became connected with a human-interest story. That was on the occasion of the separation of Norway from Sweden. After the end of the Napoleonic wars the King of Sweden, the famous French

general Bernadotte, had been rewarded for his betrayal of his former friend, General Bonaparte, by being given the crown of Norway. Norway for the last four centuries had been under Danish domination. Denmark, however, had to be punished for having remained faithful to Napoleon. The King of Sweden had also become King of Norway. The Bernadottes (let this be said to their everlasting credit) had followed a very moderate and sensible course and had been quite successful at their difficult task of running their two kingdoms simultaneously. Gradually, however, the Norwegians had come of age (both economically and politically), until at last they wanted to be masters in their own home and began to clamour for independence. In any other part of the world, such an issue would have led to bloodshed. But these highly civilized nations had sufficiently outgrown their antediluvian instincts to know that a war between them would be worse than wicked—it would be foolish. And so they had bade each other farewell with perhaps a certain amount of personal resentment but without any lasting feeling of mutual ill-will.

During this crisis Nansen, the former explorer, had played a most useful rôle as mediator and counsellor of patience. He had summed up the situation with great and good common sense: if, in any such union between two nations, one of them feels that it is not getting a square deal—he had argued—then why continue a situation that can only lead to constant friction? Why not separate peacefully and each go his own way?

As soon as the union between Norway and Sweden had been formally dissolved, Nansen had been chosen to represent the new kingdom in London as the first Norwegian Minister. Three years later, after things had quietened down, he had gone back to his scientific labours and up to the outbreak of the first World War had been fully occupied with his writing and with occasional expeditions to the northern seas. During the war itself he again had become representative at large of the Norwegian people to the rest of the civilized world. He had gone to America to see to it that Norway received those supplies that were essential to its existence, and as soon as the Armistice had been declared, he had accepted a commission from the League of Nations to repatriate half a million prisoners of war which the old Tsarist Government had gradually accumulated in Siberia.

When Russia had collapsed Nansen had established a relief committee (after the Hoover pattern) to feed the hungry Russian millions. At the same time he had headed that department of the League of Nations which took charge of the people (now turning up in every part of the world) who had lost their citizenship in one country and had not been allowed to acquire it in another. When Mussolini, in an early outburst of megalomania, bombarded the Greek island of Corfu, it was Nansen who had had

the courage to protest, in the meetings of the League, against this act of savagery. Indeed, if there had been a dozen Nansens or even half a dozen in Geneva, the ill-starred League might have amounted to something. But Geneva had soon degenerated into a stronghold of dilatoriness and complacency and correct diplomatic behaviour, until it collapsed through its own inherent weakness, rather than through any efforts on the part of its enemies.

Even then Nansen had not given up his indomitable faith in mankind, and, returning to Oslo, he had continued his labours for his fellow-men, without any thought of self.

Fridtjof Nansen died in May of the year 1930. He had a happy death. He went to sleep and never woke up. That magnificent engine which had so faithfully served him through so many years at last gave out. The little spark which sixty-nine years before had been borrowed from nature's limitless reservoir of energy was once more surrendered to its original source. But the work it had accomplished continues to make itself felt, and in this age of little men (and was there ever such a dearth of truly great leaders to-day?) we notice with painful clarity how much we lost when this public-spirited citizen of the world ceased to bother the pin-headed politicians of the post-war era by giving an example of completely unselfish leadership. Fridtjof Nansen was the sort of man who would have been ideally suited to act as the commander not merely of polar expeditions, but of expeditions infinitely more difficult, complicated, and dangerous than those to the frozen north. I refer to those excursions into the realm of applied politics, which so far have rarely produced anything but rank failure because they were entrusted to the wrong kinds of commanders.

And now we are in Amsterdam, and it is early in the month of November of the year of our Lord 1596. The town has at last taken the side of the Prince of Orange and has joined the rebellion against the King of Spain. The city is humming with business, for now one can once more trade wherever and with whomever one wishes. The whole world has become the oyster of these expert fishermen of the North Sea, and pearls are to be found in many of the bivalves which until then have been considered the exclusive property of His Most Catholic Majesty, the sour-faced Philip of evil memory.

Of course, one must accept the good with the bad. Mercurius, a most undependable deity, kept joggling his scales in a most unpredictable manner. To-day he would cause the ruin of half a dozen men who until then had been regarded as pillars of the Stock Exchange, and to-morrow he would drop millions into the laps of a brace of fly-by-night speculators



who, until then, hadn't had a pot in which to cook their daily porridge. Only last year one of the most promising of ventures—one that seemed to be absolutely foolproof—had turned out to be a sad failure. It was true that most of the money had been provided not by private individuals but by the town of Amsterdam itself, but in the end that was pretty much the same, for the citizens would have to recoup the magistrates for their losses by paying extra taxes. Nobody, however, felt inclined to grumble, for if the expedition had been successful, as the most learned geographers of the day had predicted that it must be, the United Netherlands would have had a route of their own to China and to the Indies and would have been the richest nation in the world.

At that moment the route to the Indies was still in the hands of the Spaniards and the Portuguese, who brooked no rivalry. But if the Hollanders could discover a passage north of Asia from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the merchants of the Low Countries would no longer be obliged to go to Lisbon for their spices and silks and, instead of being middlemen, they would deal at the source, which often meant a net profit of three or four hundred per cent.

Two ships had therefore been equipped to try the North-eastern Passage by way of Cape Chelyuskin. That route was fairly well known as far as the strait which separated the island of Novaya Zemlya from the Russian mainland. That strait held a great fascination for the Amsterdam city fathers. For a strait was a narrow opening from one sea into another. Once you had fortified it with a couple of guns, you could close it to all outsiders and you had got hold of a nice little monopoly of your own.

The medieval ideal of monopolistic control as the only sound source of commercial profit still spooked around in the heads of these sixteenth-century traders, and they stocked their two ships well with cannon of different calibre and hopefully put their skippers in charge of a cargo of trade goods which might prove attractive to the heathen Chinese. As the vessel which penetrated farthest north was destroyed, the pieces of ordnance proved a complete loss. But it is typical of the sense of order and loyalty of these old sailors that, shipwrecked as they were, they returned in their open boats with all the merchandise that had been entrusted to their care. They might lose their lives, but business was business, and a trust was a trust.

The two ships selected for this venture were small and not particularly seaworthy, but who wanted to risk new vessels on so hazardous an undertaking? One of them (the smaller one) was under command of Captain Jan Corneliszoon de Rijp. The other was entrusted to Jakob van Heemskerk.

This Jakob van Heemskerk was a man of tried ability. He belonged

to an excellent family, and in the year 1595 members of good families rarely took to the sea. It was not considered nice. Heemskerk was the exception. He had been well educated, was as good a scientist as they came in his day; furthermore he already had had some experience in sailing the Arctic sea.

But the real hero of the expedition was a certain Willem Barents. A native of Terschelling, one of the North Sea islands, just north of the province of Holland, he had started life as a cabin boy and had therefore come up the hard way. He had been north twice before and knew more about the coast of Siberia than anyone else whom the Amsterdam burgo-masters could have hired.

I imagine him as a rather small man, stockily built, with a square sailor's beard, and slow but sure in all his movements. A pious and God-fearing old skipper with a strong streak of conservatism in his make-up. This streak of conservatism showed itself when he was proved to be dead wrong in some of his calculations about the return of the sun. During many centuries this error greatly puzzled the scientific commentators upon the famous voyage of 1596. How could as careful a mathematician as old Willem Barents have been so far amiss in his figuring? Until it dawned upon them that Willem Barents, who had grown up under the so-called 'old calendar,' had refused to accept the 'new calendar' which was then beginning to be accepted by all modern-minded navigators as the only reliable time-schedule.

But that same quality of obstinacy proved to be of the greatest value after his ship had been wrecked in the ice of the Kara Sea. Without a leader of his calibre to guide them through their disastrous experiences, it is highly doubtful whether any of his shipmates would ever have lived to tell the tale of their adventures. And so, bless old Willem's stout heart, for though he himself left his bones on Russia's bleak shores, the others got safely home, and that is about the highest praise one can pay to the commander of any expedition that comes to grief.

There was still one other member of the ship's staff who should be mentioned. That was the doctor (or barber-surgeon, as he was then called), a certain Gerrit de Veer. He was a Jack-of-all-trades and, furthermore, a cheerful and optimistic soul who well deserves the fame he gained as the official chronicler of this early invasion of the frozen north. It was he who forced the men to pay at least a minimum of attention to their personal hygiene, and to take daily exercise when they themselves would have preferred to spend the whole of the winter sitting in front of the fire of their little wooden hut. It was he—their doctor—who told them to eat moss when scurvy began to make its dread appearance. Also, being a musician of sorts (he himself played the flute), it was de Veer who

organized those amateur theatricals which did so much to keep up the morale of seventeen men forced to spend an entire winter cooped up in a small wooden house and condemned to months of idleness.

Without any difficulty, the two vessels reached the Arctic Ocean. Once there, de Rijp and Barents disagreed upon the course to follow. Barents wanted to go due north-east while de Rijp favoured a more western course. When two Dutch skippers disagree firmly upon any point (whether it be a point of the compass or the best way to stow away their barrels of beer or fill a pipe), there is only one thing for them to do—each one must work out his own salvation according to his own best judgment. The two skippers therefore bade each other farewell, de Rijp going northward and Barents holding to that eastern course which after a few weeks' sailing was to make him the discoverer of Spitsbergen, the land of the ragged mountains. From Spitsbergen, Barents and Heemskerk sailed once more in an eastern direction until they reached the coast of Novaya Zemlya. They followed it northward, rounded Cape Mauritius, and counted themselves very fortunate when they beheld the open waters of the Kara Sea. From here, as they had been told by the Amsterdam map-makers, it would be only a short and easy distance to Cape Chelyuskin, where the Asiatic mainland reached its northernmost point and from where they could sail due south until they reached China.

But once in the Kara Sea, their troubles began. It was now well within the month of August, and the polar winter was at hand. One morning they woke up to find their ship solidly frozen into the ice. Before the days of dynamite (used in 1896 to set the *Fram* free) it was impossible to dig a channel through which a vessel could thereupon proceed to the nearest open water. Heemskerk and Barents discussed the situation and came to the conclusion that they had been trapped. They must prepare to spend the winter in the Arctic and try their luck next spring.

It was the first time the white man had been forced to face the hardships of the long polar night. I think that the most delightful part of the whole voyage lies in the complete co-operation between the two men who headed the expedition. The younger man, in nominal command, tactfully and gracefully conceded to the greater wisdom and experience of his older subordinate. There never was any friction, but such harmonious understanding that in all subsequent accounts of the voyage (and de Veer's book became an international best-seller which maintained itself for many centuries) Willem Barents is accepted as the actual leader of the expedition.

They now had to prepare for six months of hibernation. They realized that the ship must be given up as a complete loss. It would be destroyed by the ever-increasing pressure of the ice. Therefore the wood might as

well be used for the construction of a house large enough to give shelter to sixteen men. The ship's carpenter (most inconsiderately) died just after the floor had been laid, but in the sixteenth century every sailor was also more or less of a carpenter and could handle an axe or a knife as cleverly as a professional woodworker, and the labour of construction continued.

The vessel had found refuge in a small bay on the north-eastern coast of Novaya Zemlya. That seemed as good a spot for the house as any other, and there it was built and there it has remained ever since. There was a plentiful supply of wood, for not only could the ship be dismantled, but the currents running westward from the coast of northern Siberia (the same currents which Nansen used three hundred years later for his dash to the Pole on the *Fram*) had carried a large number of dead trees to the east coast of Novaya Zemlya. It was hard work to drag these from the shore inland, and as two of the men were too sick to do any manual labour, the others had to do everything.

The roof offered the greatest difficulties. The sailors solved the problem by constructing a flat frame across which they spread one of the ship's sails. This they weighted down with a layer of sand. Then the Lord obligingly covered the sand with snow. Soon the snow became ice, and the roof remained perfect until the rains of spring melted it away.

They had no stones for a chimney, but most of the men remembered the peasant farms of their childhood days, when the fire burned in the middle of the floor and when the smoke went up and out through a hole in the roof. They knew enough about air currents to give that hole in the roof greater drawing power by using an old barrel as a chimney-pot. But their knowledge of ventilation did not go quite far enough. Indeed, on one occasion, during the heavy blizzards of January, some of the brighter lads hit upon the idea of increasing the indoor temperature by filling up the chimney with pillows and then using some of the ship's precious coal instead of the usual driftwood to get a hotter kind of fire. As a result, the whole expedition was almost asphyxiated. Fortunately, Chirurgeon de Veer—always on the job—woke up just in time and had sense enough to kick the door open. After that they never again indulged in such foolish experiments, but lay in their bunks and shivered.

However, from time to time they were made to get up. Their inventive barber had constructed a steam bath out of an old beer barrel, and everybody was obliged to use it at least once a week. The men slept in bunks erected along the southern side of the house. Barents, who was in bad health, was given a special bed by the side of the fire to the right of their dinner-table, which also held the hour-glass. In addition to this hour-glass, they had a regular clock which showed that the men who had



CROSS-SECTION OF THE "SAFE SHELTER"

equipped the ship had been quite modern in their ideas. In the year 1596 few ships went to sea carrying a clock. Since one was supposed to sail by God and by guess, a little extra guessing did not really matter, and besides the poor expeditionary clock soon gave up the ghost. How could it have survived? During half of the day its innards were roasted and during the other half they were frozen stiff, and no clock then constructed could stand such outrageous treatment. After their clock had given up its ticking ghost, they had to depend upon the hour-glass to know what day and what week it was, and one man was constantly on guard with no other duty than to turn the glass when it had run its course.

The cabin was illuminated by a single oil lamp suspended from the middle of the ceiling, and a large iron pot full of water was placed in the middle of the fire. This filled the room with a certain amount of moisture and provided the men with hot water for their soup. When everything had been finished, the dwelling was officially baptized the Safe Shelter (*Behouden Huis* in Dutch), and the sailors moved in.

Then the long siege began.

December came with an uninterrupted series of blizzards. Soon the snowdrifts outside reached up to the roof, and the men had to tunnel their way outside whenever they wanted to bring in fresh firewood.

At first they were greatly disturbed by the foxes, who, attracted by the pleasant odours of cooking (escaping through the barrel on the roof that served as a chimney), came galloping across the roof. But soon the sailors found that this was a very convenient arrangement, for now they need not go very far outside to set their traps, and within a week they had a plentiful supply of fox-skins. They needed these not only for coats and hats but also for footwear. The shoes they had brought with them from Holland had become useless. They had so often been soaking wet and thereupon had so frequently been dried out before the open fire that they had cracked wide open. The sailors, however, were clever with their knives. They carved themselves wooden soles out of driftwood and covered these with fox fur, and, as a result, none of them suffered badly from frozen toes during the whole of that long winter—quite a record for an Arctic expedition, especially one of three hundred years ago.

The climax of their suffering was reached on New Year's Day, when for an entire week such a terrific hurricane swept across the island that no one could go out for driftwood, and the inmates of the Safe Shelter were forced to burn some of their home-made furniture to keep warm.

On January 6, the feast of the Magi, the blizzard stopped, but the morale of the men was at a pretty low ebb and the versatile ship's barber thought it would be a good idea to have a little party. The first mate was elected King of Novaya Zemlya, and a special dinner was prepared, and

all the other festivities connected with Three Kings' Day in the home country were carefully observed. The meal, in case the reader is interested, consisted of pancakes and ship's biscuits soaked in hot wine until they were eatable.

And so the long winter went by until once more there was a short glimmer of light on the distant horizon, and the prisoners knew that the worst part of their period of detention would soon be over, and they could start work on the two boats that were to carry them to safety as soon as the sea should be open.

Work in the open proved a great boon to their health, for they had rarely ventured outside of the house during the long months of winter. In January, one more sailor died. He was the last one to be buried on Novaya Zemlya. Finally, early in March, the ice began to break up, but they had to wait until June before they could actually hoist sail and bid a tearful farewell to that staunch little wooden hut which had been their home for such a long time. Before the door was locked and barricaded against bears and foxes, William Barents wrote three letters, giving an account of their adventures. One of these was placed in a powder-horn which was hung in the chimney. It was found there three centuries later, still in a fairly good state of preservation.

Early on the morning of June 13 Willem Barents was carried to the boat, together with one other sailor who was too weak to walk. The course they followed was first of all due north, until they reached the end of their island. From there they went south-west by south until at last they reached the northern coast of Siberia. From that point on, they followed that coast in the hope of reaching the mouth of the White Sea. Barents, although a desperately sick man, now forced to live and sleep in an open boat, never ceased to make the necessary nautical observations. He noted the capes they discovered carefully on his map, and correctly, too, for many of them are to be found to this day under their Dutch names and right there where they should be. After ten more days the sick sailor died, and one morning, old Willem Barents commended his soul to God and quietly slipped off into his final sleep.

At last they reached what must have been the mouth of the White Sea. Their home-made boats leaked very badly. The people in the smaller boat were most of the time sitting waist-deep in water. Their masts had broken, and their rotting sails were full of holes. Whenever they tried to go on shore, they were at once attacked by battalions of hungry polar bears. It was therefore impossible for them to make fires and prepare themselves hot meals. They were all of them on the point of exhaustion, and early in July one more sailor died of what seems to have been pneumonia. A strange detail—even during this desperate flight from death

they still carried those trade goods with them with which they were supposed to have done business with the Chinese, and on the first warm day of summer, by order of Heemskerk, these materials were unpacked and dried that they might be brought back to Amsterdam in as good a condition as possible. Apparently they had never thought of the possibility of using some of this extra baggage to replace their own threadbare wardrobes.

They still had to pass through several other uncomfortable adventures. Owing to the presence of the heavy ironclad boxes which were part of their luggage, their compasses had gone haywire, and without reliable maps they only knew the general direction in which they were supposed to sail if they wanted to get back to civilization, but no precise details were available. A few days later all of them were attacked by scurvy, but on one small island they discovered a lot of scurvy grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), and that put them back on their feet in no time at all.

And then, finally and at last, they met their first Russian fishing-smacks. The rest of the voyage was comparatively easy, although on one occasion they were still obliged to row for thirty hours at a stretch. In August they reached the Kola Peninsula. There a sudden fog separated the two boats, and for several days they did not know where they were or whether their companions were still alive. The fog lifted, however, before either of the vessels had suffered any serious harm, and together they reached the first Russian settlement, where they were most kindly received, and where they ate their first square meal in more than two months.

And now, while recuperating in that Samoyed village, they were most unexpectedly united with Captain de Rijp. After a useless search up and down the Arctic Ocean, he had finally been blown into the White Sea, where he and his men had spent the winter. De Rijp took his former comrades on board his own vessel, and on October 6 they all bade farewell to their kind Russian hosts, leaving them their two leaky boats as a souvenir. Twenty-three days later they were back home.

As they had long since been given up as lost, their unexpected return created a tremendous commotion. What happened to these men afterwards we do not know. Common sailors are apt to lead anonymous lives. They probably went back to sea as soon as nobody was any longer willing to offer them a couple of glasses of ale in return for a lovely yarn about polar bears as big as horses and mountains of ice as high as a church tower. After that—well, a fellow had to live. So it was back to the ocean waves, to live or die as the case might be. And if it had not been for an enterprising publisher who had persuaded Master de Veer to write down an account of their adventures and sufferings, the whole story of that memorable voyage might have been as completely lost as that of many





THE MEN OF NOVAYA ZEMLYA HAD LIVED SAFELY THROUGH  
THEIR TERRIBLE WINTER

similar trips which were not accompanied by a barber who handled a goose quill as readily as his razor and scalpel.

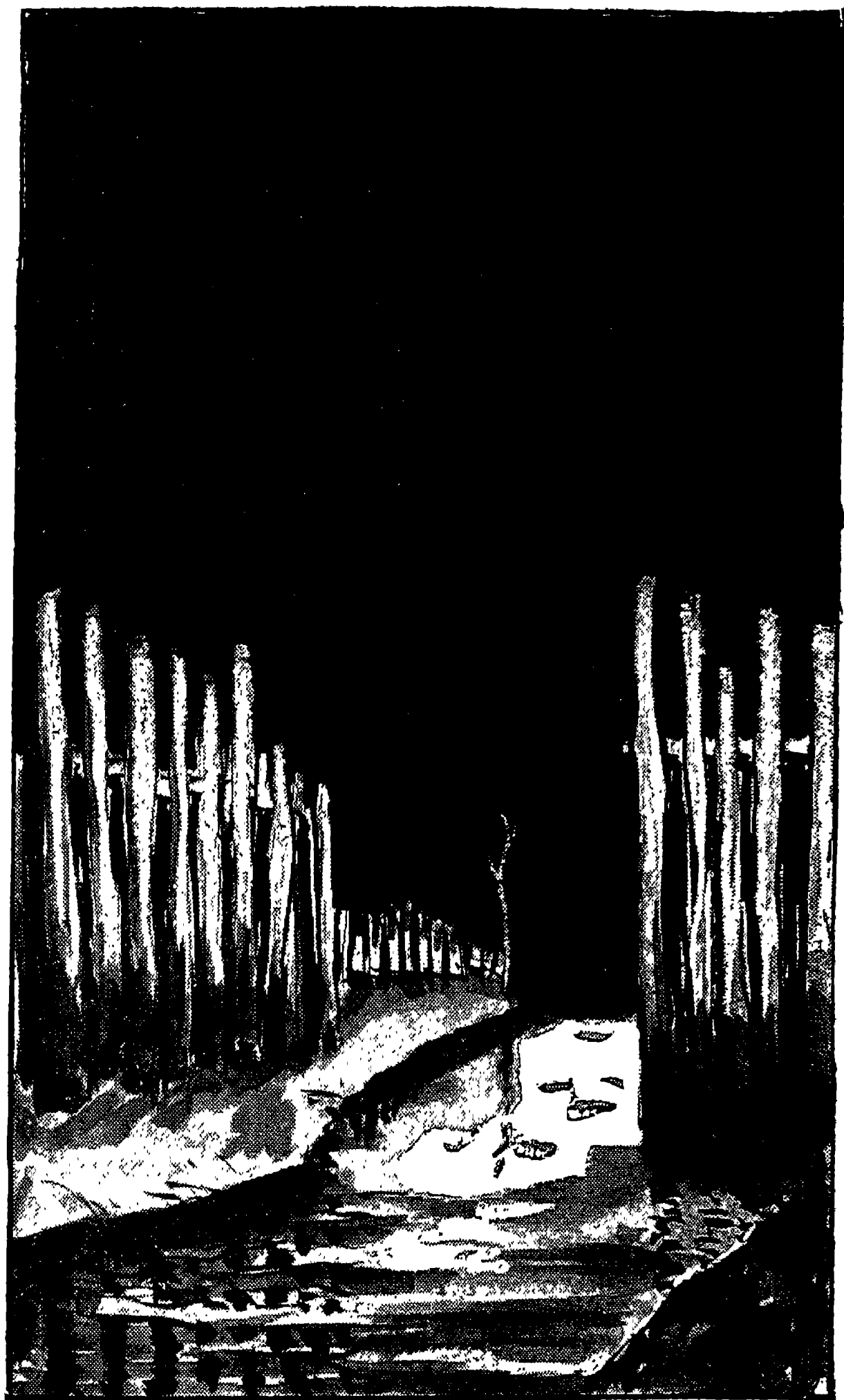
One more word about Jakob van Heemskerk, who so bravely had led his men through all their tribulations and had safely guided them back to their port of departure. He continued to serve his country as commander of a man-of-war. In the year 1607, during an engagement with the Spaniards off Gibraltar, he was shot through the heart and killed.

We had had strange weather all through the year. A very warm and early spring had been followed by a cold and wet summer. But the autumn had been exceptionally warm until almost the last week of November. Then it had turned extremely cold, and we were to experience the hardest winter since 1892. All the canals were frozen over, and even the Scheldt was so densely covered with ice that the ferry service with Noord Beveland had to be suspended, and the few people who insisted upon crossing to the island had to take their chances and go on foot.

As Jimmie insisted on keeping our home in Veere at an even New York temperature, I had escaped from my hothouse study to get my daily modicum of fresh air before I was due at Frits' for dinner. In Veere we did not have much choice when we went out for a short constitutional, and so I wandered towards the canal which connected our town with Middelburg. The locks had not been opened for almost ten days, and the ice on the canal was so solid that people drove their sleighs across it when they wanted to go to town.

There also had been a great deal of skating by the younger part of the population, but it was an exceedingly cold night, and the canal lay deserted. As it was still twenty minutes before seven, I spent a few moments standing on one of the locks, partly to recover my breath (for the temperature was near zero) and also to enjoy the lovely quiet of that frozen evening. Suddenly from behind the bend in the canal I beheld a solitary skater hastening to Veere. He seemed a very powerful man, for although he had to navigate against a strong wind, he proceeded at a rapid clip. His method of skating was not like that of our natives, who had carefully stuck to the old-fashioned and clumsy Frisian skates, which were fine for long distances but did not allow of much speed. The stranger, however, although he wore our own kind of skates (which are fastened to the shoes with leather straps), was going at least twenty miles an hour, and soon he had come close enough for me to recognize him. It was the face I would never forget, the face of the hero of my childhood days, Fridtjof Nansen.

When close to the high steel gates of the locks, he stopped abruptly and then looked round to see where there might be a convenient place for him to set foot on land. As I knew that the lock-keepers were apt to



THE DESERTED HARBOUR OF OUR LONELY VILLAGE

keep the water near their locks open in spite of the prevailing temperature and was afraid that the stranger might come to grief, I waved at him and by means of gestures I showed him where it would be safe for him to reach the bank of the canal. He made a gesture to show that he had understood, and a moment later I found him sitting on an old cannon (Holland is full of old cannon, now used for mooring ships), taking off his skates and stamping his feet to restore circulation.

"These skates are all right," he said before I had even had time to welcome him, "but why do people stick to these terrible straps? They cut off all circulation. I think that our Norwegian method of fastening the skates right to the soles of the shoes is a much better one. I hope you won't be offended by my criticism, but I feel as if my feet had been completely frozen."

I answered him that I completely agreed, but I reminded him that we were a people of farmers and fishermen and that farmers and fishermen were apt to be rather conservative.

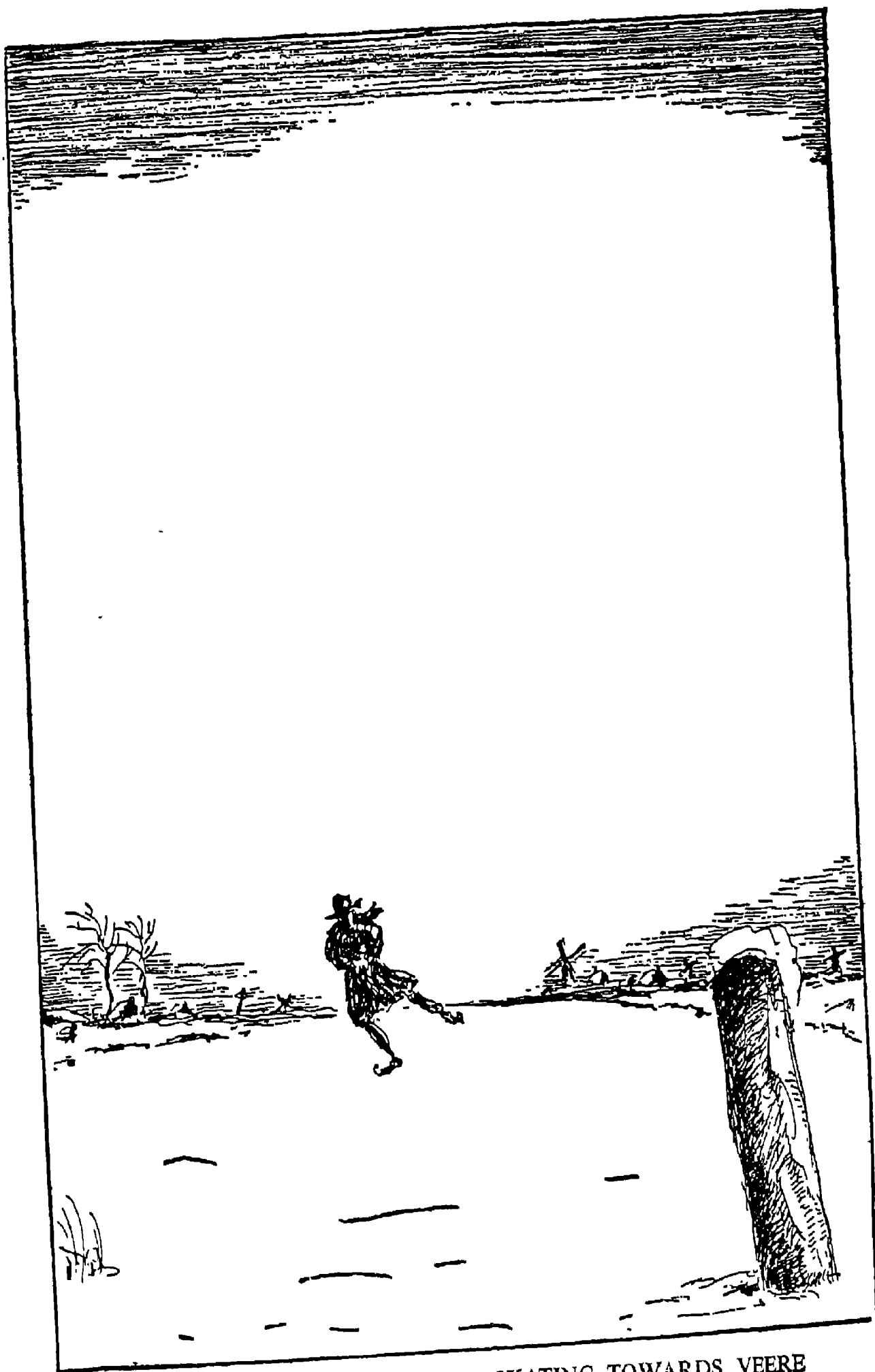
He smiled as he looked up at me. "My dear sir," he said, "you are telling *me* who have spent most of my life with the men of the sea? I sometimes wonder they have been progressive enough to accept the compass!"

Then he got up. "I think I can walk again," he told me, "and now, since you seem to live here, you can perhaps tell me at which house I am expected for dinner to-night. I do not know the names of my hosts, but I have a description of the house." I assured him that he would not be obliged to make much of a search, for I had come to the canal for the express purpose of meeting him. That evening my little white lie did not go down quite so well.

"That is curious," Nansen said, looking me straight in the eyes, "for I myself had no idea that I would come skating in on you this way. I had expected to walk, but in Middelburg, in a second-hand shop, I saw those skates and they were so reasonable I decided to try and see whether I could still use them. I had no money, but they gave them to me for three of my medals, for where I am now, medals are not of much use, but I carried them in my pocket as a souvenir of happier days."

"Then you are fond of skating?" I asked, none too brightly, I am afraid.

"Skating and ski-ing and mountaineering have always been my hobby," he answered, "but all that was long ago. They told me that my heart had given out and that I must be very careful and not exert myself. But this moment I feel as well as I ever did, though I must have gone pretty fast the last two miles or so. And now tell me, do you live here the whole year round and is it always as cold in winter as to-night? For this beats



IT WAS NANSEN WHO CAME SKATING TOWARDS VEERE

Greenland, not to mention Novaya Zemlya, where your ancestors sat and shivered all winter long in their little wooden house and almost died of cold, while if they had only gone out and taken a little normal exercise they would have been as comfortable as we are in Norway."

This remark surprised me, and I asked him, "Then you know about that famous expedition of three centuries ago?"

"Of course I do," he replied. "It was the first regular polar expedition of all time, and I wrote about it in my history of Arctic explorations."

"Then you would be interested in meeting some of the survivors to-night?"

"Of course I would, but how could I? You don't mean to say they are here?"

"Not yet," I said, "at least I have not yet seen them. But we thought it would be rather fun to bring you together, and so we invited three of them. It is now five minutes to seven. In a few minutes we shall know whether they could come."

When a moment later I opened the door of Frits' house, I saw that I need not have worried, for all three of our Novaya Zemlya friends were sitting in front of the open fire, enjoying a glass of hot Swedish punch.

They got up when we entered, and bowed most politely. I wondered at their civility, for I knew that they could never have heard of Fridtjof Nansen or his exploits, since they had died many centuries before the Norwegian had appeared upon the scene. But looking up at Nansen, who towered by my side (and I am almost six foot three), I understood. When Nansen entered a room, people got up. Perhaps it was his eyes which compelled this act of involuntary homage. They were the largest eyes I had ever seen, as well as the bluest. Besides, there was something in them that made you feel, "If this man bids me follow him to hell, of course I will follow."

Nansen seemed completely unaware of the impression he made. He walked up to Erasmus and most cordially shook him by the hand. "After Holbein, my dear Doctor," he said, "you need no introduction. I would have recognized you anywhere. And had I lived a few hundred years earlier, you would have given me a special chapter in your *Praise of Folly*, for surely there never has lived a more foolish tribe of men than we people, who wasted all the happy days we might have spent with our families, travelling endlessly through snow and ice to reach a spot which, if ever it is found, will look very much like those snowy fields through which I passed on my way to your village."

Erasmus, answering slowly in his dignified and antiquated German (for Nansen had used High German in addressing him), shook his head a couple of times and then he asked, "Tell me, were you lonely or

unhappy when you were out there in the midst of your ice and snow and practically alone?"

"Of course not. I was much too busy trying to keep alive."

"And were you ever unhappy and lonely when you were back in civilization?"

"Very often, and I detest what people call civilization."

"Then," Erasmus concluded, "I don't think I could ever have included you in my little book, for you are a wise man indeed. And now let me present you to your fellow-guests. They too were among the wise ones. They came to live in this delightful village."

"But I already know them," said Nansen, with gay eagerness. "You, sir, must be Captain Barents, whose sea I have often crossed on the way to eastern Siberia. And you, sir, must be Captain van Heemskerk. My compliments, sir. You did a most efficient piece of work, bringing your men home safely. And this must be our good Surgeon de Veer, whose book was one of my most cherished possessions when I was a small boy, back in Christiania. I am only sorry that I could not read it in the original Dutch, but I hope you can at least understand me. A little Plattdeutsch and a bit of Norwegian almost equals Dutch, doesn't it?"

"It does," Barents answered, "and my own Terschelling dialect was not so different from what I learned when once I had a crew, half of whom were Norwegians."

"And there is always English," Heemskerk answered.

"Of course there is," Nansen answered.

"And the rest can be said on the flute," de Veer added. "I have brought mine, and when I can no longer follow you I will toot the rest."

The evening had started out most happily, and it continued that way until the old Veere chimes struck the unwelcome hour of midnight. For it was one of those nights when everything seemed to click. The music (although we had very little of it) pleased our guests, and Barents and de Veer were so delighted with Kuhnau's *David and Goliath* that we had to ask Hein to repeat it. Especially the scene in which David slays Goliath and in which you hear the whizzing of the stone after it leaves David's sling filled their simple hearts with joy, although they derived equal pleasure from some of Sweelinck's *Echoes*.

And then Jo, who had already become great friends with the three men from Novaya Zemlya (it is so easy when you speak the same language), told us that dinner was ready, and we left the fireplace and moved over to the dinner-table. None of our guests seemed to be exactly what one might have called gourmets. They had never been in the habit of eating for the sake of eating, but had partaken of food merely to keep alive, and

had often known the pangs of hunger. But the old-fashioned Dutch meal was very much to their taste, and the three Dutchmen were especially delighted with a large dish of fried potatoes which Jo had added as an afterthought. They had never tasted potatoes before and liked them, but whether it was the potatoes themselves which so greatly appealed to them, or whether it was the way they had been fried, I could not tell. I overheard, however, how de Veer said to Heemskerk, "Captain, if we had had these vegetables just once a week, none of our men would ever have had scurvy." In which he was much nearer to the truth than he could possibly have suspected. For it was not until several hundred years after his own expedition that Captain Cook proved the connexion between scurvy and a lack of fresh vegetables. De Veer, however, was a close observer and he may have suspected something about the relationship between fresh fruit and the deadly scourge of all old sea voyages.

The old-style pudding too had been a fine idea, for it reminded the three Dutchmen of their midwinter celebration on Novaya Zemlya, when they had tried to boil a pudding like ours and had been obliged to compromise on pancakes.

But to Frits and me, the most delightful part of the evening came after our guests had had their first taste of a hot cup of coffee (two of them liked it, but Barents complained that it was too bitter for him and asked for another glass of ordinary beer), and when they began to talk shop. There is, of course, nothing more fascinating in the whole wide world than to be present when men who know their jobs well talk shop. It is almost as satisfying as listening to the practising of a great artist. Nor does it matter in the least whether one knows anything about the subject or not. I have had quite as much fun sitting in on a session of football coaches as attending a supper where a couple of astronomers settle down to rearrange the universe. And I shall never forget that evening at the Algonquin when Knute Rockne and Ty Cobb were comparing forward passes and the best way to slide bases. I did not know a thing about either subject, but I had a marvellous time.

It was very much the same at Frits' house when we entertained Nansen and the staff of the Novaya Zemlya expedition. For after the last cup of coffee had been drunk (Barents finally agreeing that with a little practice he might learn to like this strange black liquid), the subject suddenly veered towards tacking. Having once upon a time written a book about ships, I knew in a general way that there was a kind of zigzag sailing known as tacking. But I had never suspected that there were almost as many ways of tacking as there are of preparing eggs. A number of empty plates became polar islands, and a wine bottle—laid on its side—became a sailing-vessel, and then the tacking began. Matches indicated the



currents that were running between the islands and how one could make headway from the south-east to the north-west with a strong wind blowing from the west and a current running east. When the dinner-table proved too small, the dishes and the bottle and the matches were moved to the floor, and Hein joined in, and the famous men, noticing at once that this simple fisherman also knew his business, accepted him as one of their own, and they were having the time of their lives until, with equal rapidity, the conversation switched from tacking to whether one could live on meat exclusively or whether he also needed vegetables.

I was sorry my good friend Stefansson, the great champion of the exclusive meat diet, was not present, for on this occasion the carnivores were in the minority, but meat apparently was only of minor interest to them, and then—again with unexpected abruptness—the talk plunged right into the heart of the subject I wanted to hear discussed most of all—the problem of morale and leadership during a long polar expedition.

Nansen had taken the lead. "A ship's crew," he said, "especially in the Arctic, is exactly like an army. Without discipline, it degenerates immediately into a mob. With too much discipline, it loses all initiative, and the men will sit down in a blizzard and freeze to death rather than find shelter behind some near-by rocks, because no one with a couple of stripes on his sleeve has told them to do so. There have been all sorts of expeditions these last four hundred years, and some came to grief because the sailors stampeded and rushed for the nearest land. Then there was that terrible expedition of Sir John Franklin. I don't think we shall ever know the details, but from the little odds and ends we have found all over King William Island, I feel inclined to say that those poor devils, over a hundred and twenty of them if I remember correctly, were lost because their officers did not know how to assume the right kind of leadership. When you think of where King William Island and Victoria Land are, just beyond the polar circle, why, I think I could have spent a winter there with nothing much more than a gun and an umbrella and an extra change of underwear."

I had read a lot about the Franklin disaster and ventured a question. "Wasn't one of the reasons," I asked, "the fact that the officers let the men do all the work?"

Here Heemskerk interrupted me. "That was all wrong," he said. "You should never tell your men to do anything you yourself would not or could not do."

"Of course not," said Nansen. "You don't have to pull a sledge all the time if you are an officer—you need your strength for other things that are much more important. But, on general principles, the men should realize that you are willing and able to pull your oar or your sledge when

it happens to be your turn and that you can do as well as the others."

Barents sighed. "I know it," he said, "and if that feeling is in your heart—if it is there really and truly—your men will know it, even if you are sick as I was and too weak to be anything but a burden to the others. I shall never forget how good those boys were to me, even when they themselves could hardly stand on their feet."

Here Frits asked the question that was on the tip of my own tongue. "I wonder," he said, "whether you would tell me—for all of you have had a lot of experience—how do you go about it to make the men do what you want them to do?"

Nansen looked at Heemskerk. "You tell him, Captain," he said, "for I don't know."

Heemskerk looked at Barents. "I don't know either, but Willem here is much older than either of us. Perhaps he knows."

But Barents too shook his head. "Maybe it is God's will," he then replied, "that they should obey you. I have been a good Christian—at least, I tried to be—I humbly tried. I believe that everything that happens in this world is foreordained by God. And I am convinced that God wanted certain of his servants to be leaders and others to be followers, even as our Lord was the leader of the blessed Apostles and as the others were his followers.

"That may seem perhaps a little too simple an explanation. But to me it is perfectly clear. I cannot conceive of a world in which there are no captains and mates and plain sailors. Such a world would not make sense. For just as I was always willing to take orders from those whom God had appointed over me (and I am sure my captain here had never any reason to complain of me), so by the same token I expected obedience from those over whom I had been placed."

We had listened very quietly. The old man had been touching in his sublime simplicity. We no longer saw the world that way, but it was a philosophy of life one could respect. It was a point of view which made sense—as long as that particular philosophy of life had prevailed.

But I was immediately attacked by certain doubts. How about Henry Hudson, surely one of the greatest navigators of all times, but a man who had never been able to exercise any kind of leadership—a skipper who had sailed the Seven Seas in ships that had always been hotbeds of mutiny—a captain who had finally lost his life because he had not even been able to control the evil temper of a member of his own family? And how about those other mutinies on the ships of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that fill some of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of discovery? How about Captain Cook, who was a progressive and liberal

and who, during all his endless years in the Pacific, had never found it necessary to flog a single man, while Bligh, a genius at the business of finding his way through uncharted waters, had literally flogged his way through the Pacific and had accomplished nothing but disaster?

I hoped that Nansen would come to my rescue, and he did.

"Master Willem is right," he said. "He is also right when he says that to-day we no longer find it possible to reduce all these difficult problems to such simple principles. We are, alas, not as devout as our grandfathers used to be. We have got into the habit of asking too many questions. To-day we are not merely satisfied with knowing that the clock runs. We also want to understand what makes it tick. But in one respect, our world has not changed."

"In what respect do you mean, sir?" Frits asked.

"In this particular respect—that unless we have a real love for our fellow-men—nothing sentimental, if you please, for they would not understand that—but a real interest in their well-being, a real desire to be of service to them (though I have come to hate that word 'service' and so please don't misunderstand me)—in short, unless those entrusted to our care feel that we think of them first and long before we even begin to think of ourselves—well then, everything else we do or fail to do is of no earthly use. The men will immediately sense it, and all control is gone."

"You are undoubtedly right, sir," said Frits, "but isn't there something more to it than that? There must be, but what is it?"

Nansen smiled at him as a father might smile at a bright boy who asks a foolish question and then he said, "But don't you see that if we knew what that something was, God would have to go out of business?"

"No," Frits answered, "I don't quite see."

"Because then we would also understand the riddle of existence. And where would the good Lord be after we human beings had succeeded in unravelling his most precious secrets?"

I thought of an answer, but I did not give it. It might have hurt old Willem Barents, and that surely was the last thing I wanted to do.

It was well past eleven o'clock before any of us looked at the clock. Barents showed signs of being somewhat fatigued, and as we had pretty nearly exhausted every problem connected with navigation and exploration, there was a lull in the conversation. As had so often happened before, it was Jo who saved us from having to say, "Well, and what now?" by suddenly bringing in half a dozen plates of *poffertjes*. There is no use trying to describe them to outsiders, for *poffertjes* are the one dish that waxes only in the Low Countries. They are a cross between a very small kind of pancake and a fritter and are the main delicacy of the annual village fairs, when special booths are erected to which loving

couples can withdraw to devour them by the plateful with lots of butter, sugar, and cinnamon, and a rather primitive form of flirting.

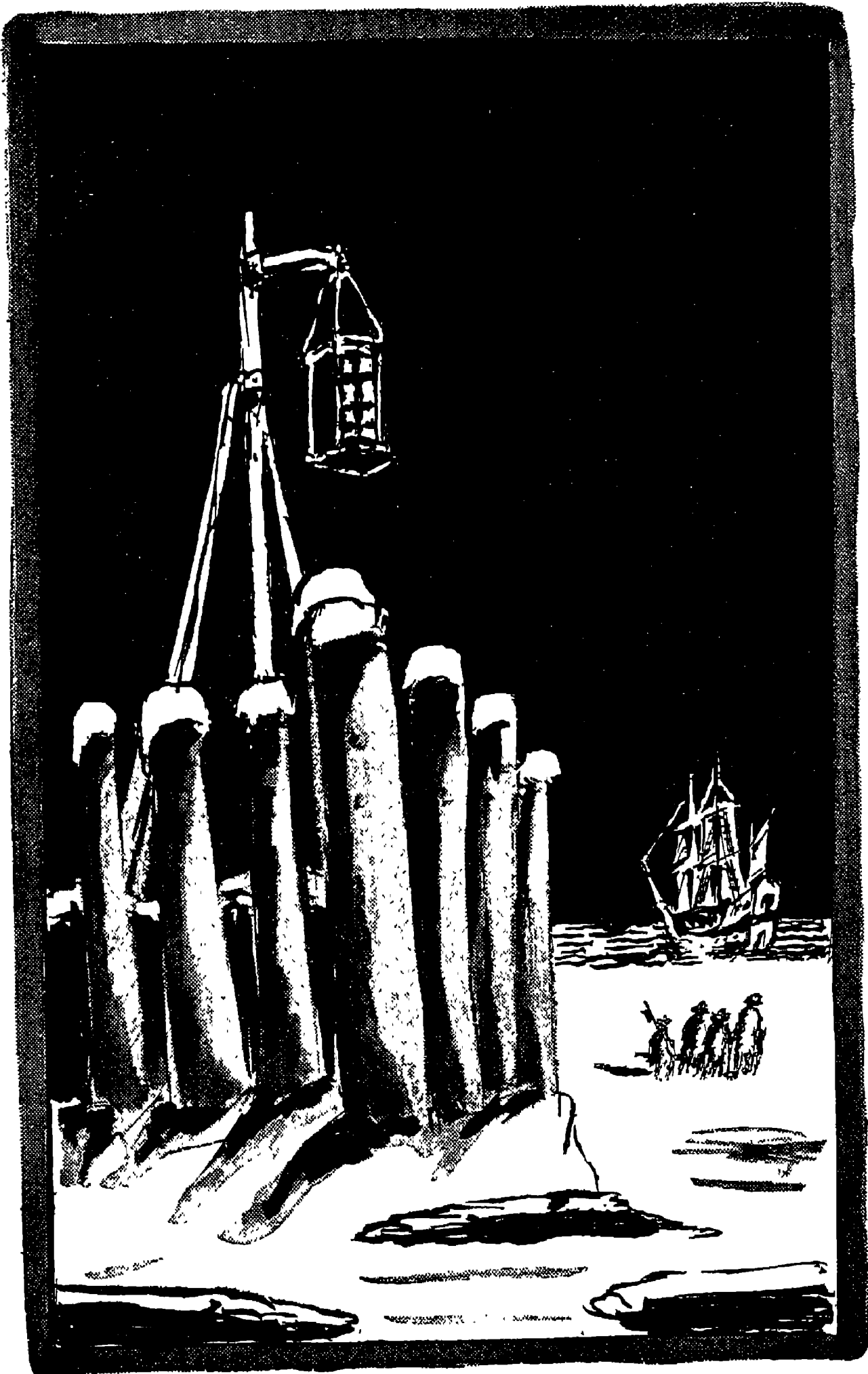
It is not easy to fry *poffertjes* in your own kitchen, and you therefore never get them in any private homes. But Jo, with her genius for cooking, had somewhere got hold of an old *poffertje* pan, and there they were as they had been eaten in the Low Countries for the last four centuries. They delighted our Dutch guests, and the Norwegian said they reminded him of something he used to eat as a little boy in Frøen, but whether that was so or whether he merely said it out of politeness, I do not know.

*Poffertjes* make for good feeling, and we told the cook and her husband to come in and join us, but Jo said no, she could not until after she had brought in the mulled wine which she had dug up out of de Veer's description of the midwinter celebration in the Safe Shelter of Novaya Zemlya. A few minutes later the mulled wine came in, steaming hot, in a lovely old pewter decanter such as had been used in the *Behouden Huis*, and Barents said, "This is wonderful! Now, I feel that I am back home!"

And after the last of the *poffertjes* had been eaten, Surgeon de Veer, whom I had presented with a Dutch edition of my book about his voyage, duly inscribed to my "distinguished fellow-author," took out his old wooden flute which he had left with his funny-looking fur coat near the piano and played us the tunes with which he had entertained his fellow-travellers during the long Arctic nights, and like all simple music, these cheering melodies carried us back to happier days as nothing else in the world will do. Then the clock started playing our *Hymn of Thanksgiving*, and de Veer added a flute obbligato of his own, though it was difficult to harmonize it correctly with the chimes, which, being very old, were also very much out of tune.

Next the candles began to flicker, and while their dwindling flames threw weird shadows upon the walls and the ceiling, we watched our guests depart in silence.

It was so cold that before going home I trotted to the tower at the end of the harbour to see what the ice was doing and whether there was any danger of the dikes of the near-by Vrouwenpolder breaking through. The moon was shining brightly across the peaceful island of Noord Beveland. There was an eerie light which made every object throw a heavy black shadow. The Scheldt was completely frozen over, but in the distance a small strip of black water showed where it ran into the North Sea where the ice and the water met. I beheld an old-fashioned sailing-vessel rocking in the waves of the Roompot. From the pictures in de Veer's book, I recognized it as the ship which had carried Heemskerk and his men to Novaya Zemlya. Four dark figures were walking across



OUR POLAR FRIENDS GO HOME

the ice in the direction of the tiny craft. Nansen and Heemskerk were supporting Willem Barents. Behind them, as befitted his place in the hierarchy of the sea, walked the faithful surgeon. He carried a halberd. After all, one never could tell. There might be bears or wolves or foxes and he must be on guard that no harm befall his masters.

When I came home, Jimmie, entirely surrounded by dachshunds (to keep her warm, I suspect), was still up and waiting for me.

"Well," she asked, "did you learn something new to-night?"

"I learned a lot," I answered, "an awful lot." Then I put some more coal on the fire, the dachshunds were dropped into their respective baskets underneath Jimmie's bed and were carefully covered up with several layers of old blankets, and we all went to sleep.

The morning came. It was as glorious and brilliant a day as I had ever seen. Outside hundreds of seagulls were endlessly soaring up and down, fighting and screeching and altogether looking like a blizzard of feathers while awaiting the moment I should come to the door to give them their daily ration of stale bread. I felt very happy. At last I had approached the secret of true leadership. There was nothing supernatural in these heroes of my childhood days. They were merely 'consecrated men' who lived 'consecrated lives' in which the idea of self had been completely repressed that they might devote themselves entirely to the task of looking after the happiness and well-being of those entrusted to their care.

## CHAPTER XXI

### I Get a Cable to Return to America, and So THOMAS JEFFERSON Is the Last of Our Guests as Well as the Most Honoured of All

WE did not have our usual luncheon that next Sunday, for Frits, very early, had driven to Rotterdam to catch a train for Berlin. He had been obliged to go there in connexion with still another loan his firm was floating, but he hoped to return the following Saturday on the Flushing mail train. To our great surprise he was back on Friday and instead of going first to Amsterdam he had come straightway to Veere, after having telegraphed Jimmie from the frontier, asking her to meet him at Flushing. We had postponed our luncheon so that he could join us. He seemed terribly upset, and, as he was a person who did not easily let himself get worried, we wondered what had happened to have given him such a case of the jitters. He had lunched on the train and so he merely drank a cup of coffee while we had our pressed beef. Meanwhile he told us about his adventures.

"Berlin was a nightmare," he began without any preliminaries. "I knew that I would find the situation changed, but I had never expected to see the things that have happened over there."

"You mean that this fellow Hitler will really come into power?"

"Will come into power? Lord help us all, he is in power right now! There is no longer any opposition. The republic is dead and gone. It never had much life, but even the last little spark has now been put out. Of course, the Government goes on, but it no longer means anything. It is as hollow as an old tree. The next gust of wind will bowl it over, and this man Hitler is no longer a gust of wind. He has become a tempest. Soon he will be a hurricane. A hurricane blowing from hell!"

"But surely," said Lucie, who had dropped in to hear the latest news, "it cannot be as bad as all that! France and England will never allow him to come in and take over the Government!"

"France and England won't move a finger," Frits answered. "France is in no position to do anything. Besides, what is France? Where is France? As I told you several weeks ago, there is no France left. France to-day is one large pawnshop run by thousands of small-souled, narrow-minded, pudgy-faced peanut vendors. Whatever business they still do is transacted over the third benedictine after a six-course luncheon and between telephone calls to the lady friends as to where they are to meet

them that evening for dinner. The soldiers go about with their elbows out of their coats and their toes sticking out of their shoes, and if war were to come to-morrow there would not be fifty aeroplanes fit to fly. France will surrender or, if it fights, it will collapse after a couple of weeks. No, forget all about your beloved France, my dear Lucie. I am sorry to hurt your feelings, but *la France héroïque* no longer exists as a power the Germans need worry about. The French people still do a lot of shouting about their democracy, but that democracy has been so completely sold out that nobody believes in it any more."

"Well, but how about England?" asked Jimmie, who has never got over her notion that the England of to-day is still that of Rudyard Kipling. "Surely England will never let Germany start another war!"

"My dear James, many people in England are much more afraid of the Bolshies than of anybody else in this world, and they hope that the Nazis, if only treated the right way (as they call it), will turn east and lick the pants off the wicked Russians. Then England won't have to do that job herself and can go on growing rich, with the Labour Party in its right place and capital on top and the lower classes tipping their caps to their betters."

I felt that it was my turn to add something to this conversation.

"How about America?" I asked.

"Well," Frits answered, "you ought to know more about that than I do. What do you think?"

"I really could not tell."

"Would America care to get mixed up in European affairs after the experience of twenty years ago?"

"It does not seem very likely."

"Well, that leaves me exactly where I began. Nobody will move a finger to stop Hitler if he makes up his mind to go ahead and grab the power in Germany. London and Paris will probably write a few angry letters and next they will tell their people that they have decided to accept the inevitable, that one cannot hope to keep a great nation like Germany down for ever, and then they will all go out for lunch. The French will eat well, and the English will eat badly, but they will all drink a lot, while Hitler will merely nibble at a couple of carrots and give orders to build another thousand aeroplanes and twice as many tanks."

"Is it really as bad as all that?"

"After what I have just seen in Berlin I would say that it is much worse."

"And is that what made you come rushing back a day early?" Jimmie asked.

"Yes. Also on account of my business, for every cent any of us ever



invested in Germany is gone for good and ever. But the main reason I came back was that I wanted to tell Jimmie and Hendrik not to be fools and wait too long. Hendrik has written and has said too many unpleasant things about little Adolf to be safe, and remember little Adolf never forgets."

"What do you mean?" Jimmie asked, instinctively picking up Noodle to protect him against possible harm. "You talk as if we should pack up and leave to-night."

"Of course not! It will take Adolf a little while to get his aeroplanes and his tanks and submarines, for this time the Germans are not going to take any risks. They cannot afford another Versailles and they know it, and it will take them two or three years to build the stuff they need before they can strike. But I know how you love Veere and I am afraid that your days here are over. You would not have the chance of a snowball in hell if the Nazis ever invaded Holland, and they will do it—depend upon that—they will do it!"

"But why? The Dutch have not done them any harm!"

"For God's sake, stop talking nonsense! The Nazis are not the sort to worry about such details, and they have long since struck the word 'morals' out of their new dictionary. They will need Flushing for their attack on England and they will turn Veere into an aeroplane base. A bull-necked Nazi will live in your house, my dear friends, and when we go to Middelburg, we can wave at you when we pass the cemetery and say, 'There they lie! It is too bad. They were such nice people. If only they had left in time!'"

"Perhaps you are right, but this is making it pretty hard for us. What do you want us to do—run away?"

"Of course not, but you told me the other day your publishers wanted you to come to America to see your *Rembrandt* through the press. Why don't you go now and spend a few weeks in America while Jimmie packs up here, for it will take at least two years for Hitler to get ready, and meanwhile she is perfectly safe? So are you, but you might as well make up your mind that our wonderful days here in Veere are over. There is no hurry, but we may as well face the facts as they are and get ready for some safe retreat where we can wait until the storm shall have swept across Europe."

"But how about you? Do you think I would leave you and go back to America alone and then live happily ever after, knowing that you were here?"

"Thanks for the compliment, for I know you mean it. And, of course, I may be a little too pessimistic, but after what I saw last week, I don't see how anybody could be otherwise. But don't worry about me. I don't

write books. I am not in the public eye. I run my little pawnshop and smoke my pipe and read my newspapers and take Millie and the kid out for rides in the car. All the same, even I, the moment I am back in Amsterdam, shall make sure that most of my money will be where no Nazi can ever get at it. So that when I join you in America, I won't send you to the poorhouse.

"No, I can perfectly well stay here and I am not exactly telling you either to run away, for you and Jimmie are not the sort. Only, now that they seem to need you in America for that new book of yours, why don't you take a short trip? You can be in New York by Christmas and you can be back here in Veere in February, and then we can go on with our dinner-parties. In the meantime we will know a little more about what is going to happen and we can stay in Veere until Hitler goes on the warpath. When he does we can take the first boat to England. The Flushing boats get us to England in less than five hours. If the worst comes to the worst we can take Hein's fishing-boat and leave when the Nazis get as far as Middelburg.

"All this sounds pretty sad, but please don't go in for heroics. You can't fight Hitler all alone, and France and England won't lift a finger to stop him. I know that you want to go on fighting him, but you won't be much good after he has plugged a couple of bullets into you. Disappear for a while and do what your publishers asked you to do, and then you come back to us for some more of our dinner-parties. In another two or three years, when the little man in the big brown boots actually starts his attack on England and America—and that is the dream of his life—then you lock your front door, and Jimmie takes little Noodle under her arm, and we will all meet in New York. But get accustomed to the idea right now that our happy days in Veere are almost over. So, by the way, are all the happy days in every other part of the world. The Allies made a mistake at the end of the last war, and now it is too late. We might as well be intelligent about it. Europe is doomed. You go to America and you go right away. The sooner you go, it seems to me, the sooner you will be back. In the meantime, whom have you invited for next Saturday?"

"Another American. I hope you don't mind."

"Not in the least. They have been about the nicest of our guests. Old Benjamin Franklin was a grand person and he was wonderful with those kids. And I shall never forget George Washington! I wish we had a dozen of their kind over here, right at this moment, instead of what we have got—third-rate fellows, without any imagination, commonplace hardware salesmen and stockjobbers, each one of them thinking of just one thing: 'Will I be able to save my own precious skin when the

deluge comes?' Now, who did you say our next guest was—a great American?"

"I personally think that, by and large, he is the greatest American who ever lived."

"That must be your old friend Mr Jefferson. He'll be wonderful!"

"I have already started writing something about him. I hope to have it ready to-morrow evening, but there's so much to say."



"Forget it. I know all about him."

"How come?"

"You gave me a book about him last spring, written by a friend of yours—Nock or some such name."

"I remember. Then I won't have to refresh your memory."

"No, you won't. The book happens to be here, right in my house. I will look through it once more to-night."

The dinner for Mr Jefferson had to be ordered very carefully. For though this noble Virginian dispensed with all outer formalities when he went to live in the President's house, abolished the title of "Excellency" for the chief executive, removed the "Honourable" from all letters to high officials, and would hardly stand for a mere "Sir" on the epistles to the lesser dignitaries, he was exceedingly fastidious when it came to his own daily mode of living. It is true that he never smoked, nor did he drink those violent spirits which were so popular in the colonies during the latter half of the eighteenth century, but he well knew the difference between good wine and the inferior sorts, and in the matter of eating it was undoubtedly quite true what his compatriot Patrick Henry said about him—that he had been abroad so long that he had long since abjured

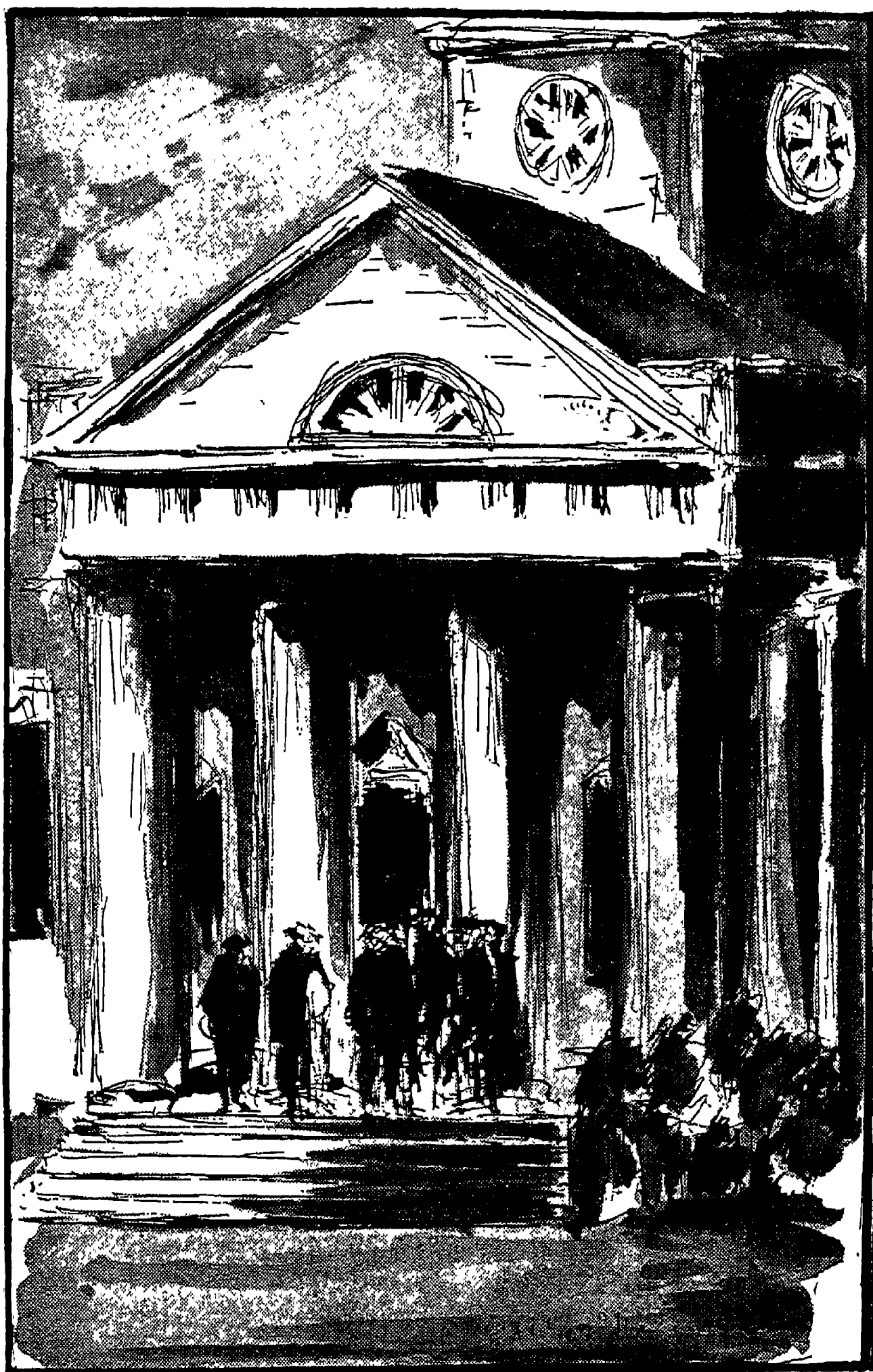
his native victuals in favour of the more delectable viands of the Old World.

Patrick Henry meant to be funny or just nasty when he made this famous statement, but to the democrats of the Henry variety (plain, two-fisted whisky-swillers and snuff-sniffers) there was a quality in Mr Jefferson they never liked. For no matter how simple and unaffected the master of Monticello might be in his personal tastes and how unaffected in his deportment, these brethren of a commoner clay always remained conscious of the fact that intellectually and spiritually their Virginia neighbour was a true aristocrat in that he would either take the best or would do without.

It is true that others with equal pretensions to social prestige were just as much aware of this, as witness Alexander Hamilton's deep dislike for his colleague while he was with him in Washington's Cabinet. But Jefferson was 'genuine' and Hamilton was not. This may be a somewhat crude way of trying to solve the problem of the antagonism that existed between those two very capable men and which made it impossible for them to co-operate. All the same, I think that that was the basis for their cordial detestation of each other. Their respective abilities were of the same high quality, but Jefferson was so superior to most of his fellow-men that he could afford to treat them as his equals. Whereas Hamilton was obliged to assume a superiority he did not really feel and then became the traditional Englishman who has gone to the wrong school, and this in spite of his Scottish antecedents.

This, too, may account for the cordial detestation in which Thomas Jefferson was held by so many members of the clergy, who never ceased to denounce him as an atheist, an infidel, and an enemy of all established religion. They may have been right in the last of these three accusations, but hardly in the first two. Jefferson, who found it difficult to accept what he used to call "established government," wishing to reduce official interference with the lives of private citizens to a minimum, had little love for any kind of tyranny, whether from the Right or from the Left or even from the Middle. He regarded a man's relationship with the Deity as a purely personal affair between the individual and his Creator. He believed in deeds and not at all in mere verbal expressions of good intentions. Whether a human being was a true disciple of Christ, he said on more than one occasion, would be shown by his acts and not by the size of the Bible he carried to church on Sunday or the heartiness with which he joined in the responses.

Jefferson had an intense dislike and a great distrust of personal arguments. "No one will ever change his mind on account of a mere argument," he was fond of saying. "A man may change his mind as a



THE SIMPLE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN OF MONTICELLO

result of his own reflections, of what he has read and slowly digested, but debates are a waste of time, as they will never persuade a person to accept a different point of view from that which he happens to hold."

Religious disputations he held in special abomination. His own relations with God Almighty were so simple that few of his neighbours were able either to follow or understand them. His own notion that one should approach the Lord and talk to Him as one gentleman to another had very little chance of being appreciated among the clergy and the laity of the middle of the eighteenth century, and least of all in a part of country where the general state of education was still as low as in the South.

In the year 1823, being then eighty years old, Jefferson decided that for once and for all he must give some definite and clear expression of his personal attitude towards religion. Until then he had never answered the endless insults and injuries that had been hurled at him for his refusal to take a stand in what were then called "the higher matters." But now, realizing that his days were numbered, he undertook to sum up his private creed in fewer than a hundred words:

"I am a Christian," he wrote, "in the only sense Christ wanted anyone to be His follower. I am sincerely attached to His doctrines in preference to all others. I ascribe to Him every human excellence, believing that He Himself never claimed any others." And in order that his own children and grandchildren should be thoroughly familiar with all that Jesus had said, he collected all the ethical lessons that were to be found in the New Testament, as you can see for yourself if you are ever fortunate enough to lay your hands on a copy of the so-called *Jefferson's Bible*.

All this, however, while no doubt very interesting, had no direct bearing upon the question of what we should offer Mr Jefferson when he should come for dinner. But, in anticipation of that most happy occasion, I had several months before written to an old friend who was a descendant of his sister Martha, who had married his best friend, Dabney Carr. This woman had inherited not only her great-uncle's easy chair—a lovely chair and big enough for me, for Thomas Jefferson too had been over six feet two—but also his mind and his charm and a great deal of his wisdom, and she had told me what dishes Uncle Tom would most likely have asked for. One of those was the spoon bread which we had already served to several of our previous guests. This was the recipe:

- 1 cup of yellow cornmeal
- 1 quart of milk
- 2 eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon of salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$  tablespoon of sugar
- 1 rounded tablespoon of butter

Place the milk in a double boiler on the fire. After it becomes piping hot, sprinkle in lightly all dry mixture, stirring it at the same time and continually stirring it until it becomes thick. Let it cook one hour. After this beat eggs all together and stir them in with the butter. Place in a baking-dish and cook thirty minutes in oven (400°) or until brown.

Spoon bread, however, does not a dinner make. I would have to add something a little more substantial, and so I had to find out whether there was anyone in Middelburg who could make waffles, for although the Dutch waffle is not at all like its American namesake, being a much thinner and more delicate creature, I thought it would be nice to let Jefferson feel as if he were back in Virginia by serving hot waffles with sugar and cinnamon at about eleven o'clock, a few hours after the regular meal. I asked Jimmie to go to Middelburg and see whether perhaps the people of the Abdij could give her the address of a waffle baker. Meanwhile I was spending the morning in Jo's kitchen, watching her make *hutspot* and trying to get up a menu that could be served as a background for the spoon bread.

Since Jefferson had always been so deeply interested in cheap and popular foodstuffs, I thought that we ought to begin with a *potage à la Camérani*, which would give him both macaroni and Parmesan cheese. Then a few *côtelettes de saumon Dorigny*. We would need some very good Madeira for our salmon, but we could get it in Middelburg. With these slices of salmon, Jo was to serve very small boiled Dutch potatoes. As the *pièce de résistance*, I had thought of duck. A *canard à la broche*—a duck roasted over an open fire—has always seemed to me the best way to prepare that kind of fowl, and Jo could stuff the ducks with chestnuts, champignons, and those olives which had been one of Jefferson's favourite fruits.

Instead of having more potatoes (a good Dutchman will eat potatoes with everything from soup to dessert) we could have spoon bread with the duck, and instead of vegetables there would be a large bowl of fresh lettuce and a plain French dressing made with tarragon vinegar, one hard-boiled egg per person, and some leeks rather than the conventional onion.

For our dessert I ordered a *sabayon chaud au vin de Porto*. That was light and fitted in with Jefferson's preference for light meals. After dinner, instead of whisky (which he detested) or more wine, I meant to present our ex-President with a cup of *slemp*. He must have drunk a lot of *slemp* when he was in the Low Countries while in search of those loans that were so badly needed by the young American republic he had just helped to found.

When I was young *slemp* was still a very popular beverage in winter. On cold nights we used to drink it all evening long, and it was especially

popular when we went skating. There were little '*slemp* tents,' flying a big Dutch flag, all over the frozen landscape, and as the stuff was completely harmless, we drank it by the bucketful.

Not finding the recipe in the modern cookery books, I went to consult Lucie, who was an inexhaustible fountain of information upon every culinary subject connected with the days of our ancestors. She asked to be excused a moment, went into her parlour, and almost immediately reappeared with a recipe for *slemp* which she remembered having seen in a cookery book her great-great-grandmother had started to write in the year 1746, when all great ladies were also supposed to be great cooks. She copied it and gave it to me, and here it is:

2 quarts of milk  
a pinch of saffron  
1 tablespoonful of tea  
8 cloves  
3 inches of stick cinnamon  
a pinch of mace  
 $\frac{1}{8}$  pound of sugar  
2 tablespoons of cornmeal

Put all the spices and the tea into a small bag like an ordinary tea bag. Drop the bag into the milk and start it boiling very slowly. From time to time, take the spice bag between two forks and squeeze the juice out of it. After about half an hour, add the cornmeal and the sugar. Then let everything simmer for another five minutes and serve it in teacups.

Of course, Jefferson might have a terrific aversion to this concoction. However, as it was easy to make and much cheaper than hard liquor, he would undoubtedly be interested in this beverage as something that might have been introduced among his Virginia neighbours to wean them away from the dangerous products of their stills. He had spent the latter half of his life looking for such substitutes but never, I am afraid, had found them.

When you are going to entertain a man of as wide tastes as Thomas Jefferson had been, the subject of music too had to be thought out with more than usual care. Our guest had been a very competent fiddler before he had suffered that accident on horseback which left him with a perpetually stiff arm. But even after he had ceased to play himself, he had kept up his interest in music and, by ordering all the best compositions that were published in London and Paris, he had always been well informed about all the latest novelties for both the violin and the pianoforte.

But how far back had he gone? Had he known Bach and Handel? Or the great Italians of the seventeenth century? I thought he probably had and I asked Hein to start our evening's concert with Bach's motet,



*Jesu, meine Freude*, and let this be followed by the first two records of Handel's *Water Music*. Then the first part of Karl von Dittersdorf's String Quartet No. 6, in A major, and Haydn's "The Heavens are Telling," from *The Creation*.

But I remembered that he could not possibly have heard a great deal of orchestral music. Even to-day the Government residing in the capital of the great nation Jefferson helped to found does not think it necessary to support a symphony orchestra and leaves this matter to private initiative. Therefore, I felt that it would be perhaps wiser to let the rest of the programme consist of very simple melodies, such as records of parts of Bach's Italian Concerto, the first part of his Toccata in D major, Haydn's Minuet in C sharp minor, and Castagnetta's rendition of Bach's "Chromatic" Fantasia and her three short pieces from *The Well-tempered Clavichord*, which she had sent me a short time before.

I also promised myself that if possible I would get our guest to talk a little upon the subject of music as part of a programme of public well-being. He was, as far as I can remember, our only President to whom music had meant something more than a hymn and *I've Been Working on the Railroad*. It would be nice to find out what he felt upon the subject.

I did not look forward to any spectacular mode of approach on the part of Mr Jefferson. I expected that he would come on horseback, and so he did, riding a fine Virginia mare which he examined most carefully after his arrival.

"There was so much snow," he explained, "that she slipped several times, but I don't think that any harm has come to her. By the way, I notice that you have a stable-boy ready to take care of her." (I had asked our local livery-stable man to be at Frits' house at seven o'clock.) "That was very thoughtful of you, but how could you guess that I would come on horseback?"

"I remembered the fourth of March of the year 1801," I answered.

"Oh, that silly story about my inauguration! As a matter of fact, I did not even go on horseback, as people still seem to say. I walked. It was much the safer way. I could, of course, have taken my coach, but with Pennsylvania Avenue one long mud puddle, it seemed much wiser to go on foot. And also, I needed the exercise. Later, I needed it even more, for being President of the United States is hard work. You are never master of your own time. Just when you want to go out for a little fresh air, some bore is sure to walk in, and, of course, you've got to see him, and he promises you that he will take only five minutes of your valuable time, but he stays five hours! In the end, you are no wiser than you were before he came, but you have lost your chance at the fresh

air. You are quite sure they will know how to take care of my horse? I am devoted to the animal."

"My dear sir, these people have taken care of horses and have loved them for the last three hundred years, so you really need not worry. And now, won't you please come in? It is cold, and you must feel tired after your long ride."

Erasmus and Frits were waiting for us, and we had (encouraged by our party of the week before) taken the liberty of inviting Lucie and Jimmie. I knew that Jimmie would appeal to the former President because of her gift for figures and her love of facts and on account of that practical common sense which was perhaps her most outstanding quality, whereas Lucie, who was a direct throwback to the eighteenth century, would remind him of all the many charming women by whom he had been surrounded during most of his life. Lucie even bore (at least, I thought so) a slight resemblance to his beloved Martha. In this I had guessed right, for just before we went to table he took her gently by the hand and said, "It will not only be an honour but a pleasure for me, madam, to spend an evening sitting by your side. You remind me of one whom I held dearer than life itself, for you have Martha's smile. There were not any Wayleses among your ancestors, were there?"

"I'm sorry," Lucie answered. "All my people were either Dutch or French. There is not a drop of English blood in my veins."

"Then it is only my great good luck that you should be the way you are," and he handed her into her chair with such exquisite elegance that I could well understand why the awkward Adamses had always disliked him so thoroughly and had denounced him for his so-called aristocratic leanings.

On a social basis Monticello and Quincy had never been able to understand each other. At times they had dropped their private differences to work for the common good of the republic, but as for inviting each other to dinner—no, that had been out of the question if it possibly could have been helped.

Jo's Zeeland costume greatly interested our guest, and he asked Lucie to tell him in detail how it was arranged.

"It takes thirty-eight pins to put it on the correct way," Lucie informed him.

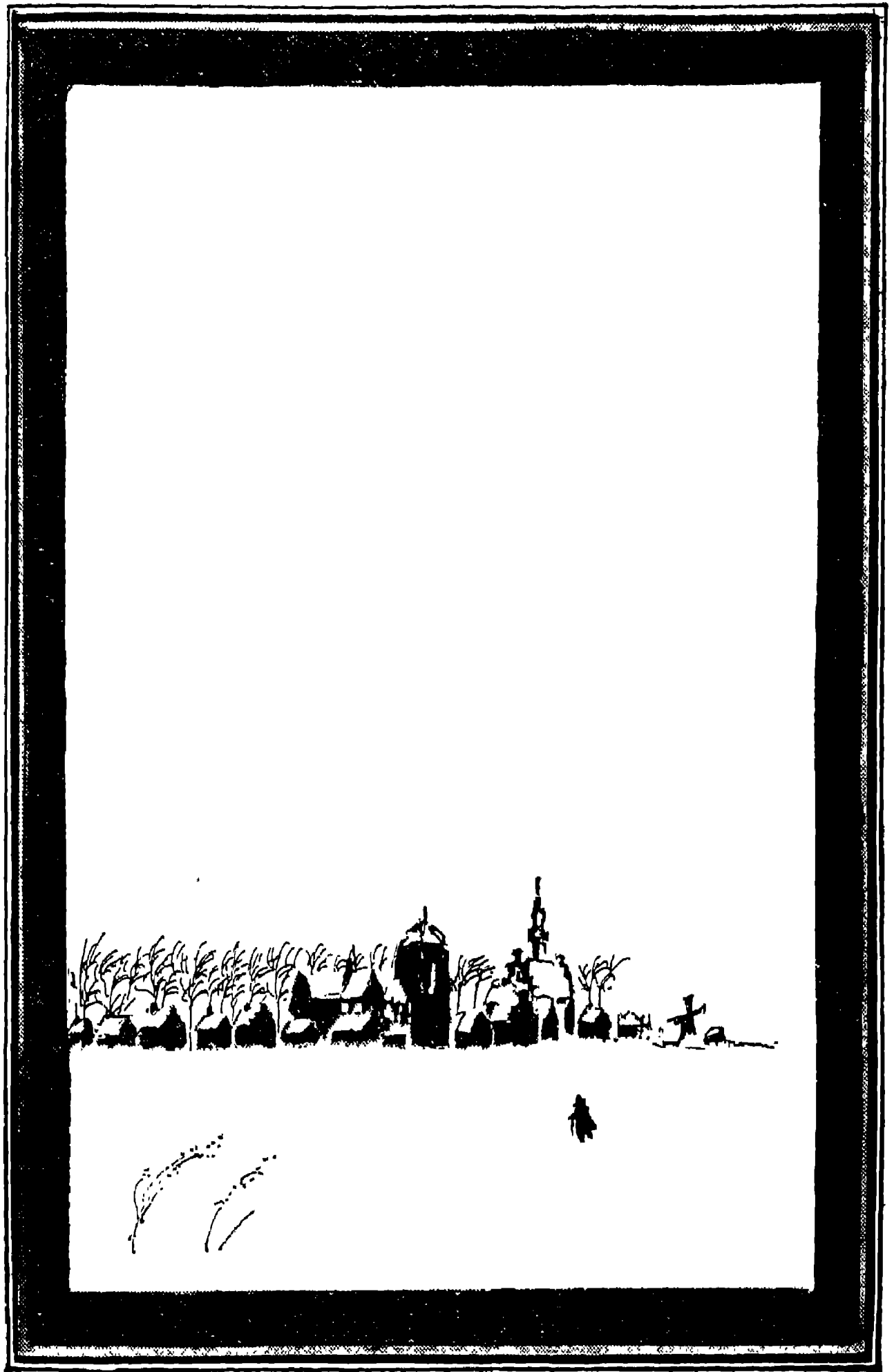
"Thirty-eight pins! Every morning! Doesn't that mean a lot of time just wasted and isn't it horribly unpractical?"

"It could not possibly be less practical," Lucie agreed.

"Then why do women go on wearing it?"

"Your Excellency knows why," Lucie answered.

"You may as well call me Mr Jefferson, ma'am."



VEERE IN WINTER

"I know that I have your permission, sir, but I have not got my own."

"That is curious! And why not?"

"Does Your Excellency see that Rembrandt etching on the wall over there?"

"I do, ma'am."

"How would it look in a cardboard frame?"

"Not so well, I'm afraid. It seems to need just that kind of frame."

"There Your Excellency has his answer," Lucie continued, "both why I shall go on giving you a title which provides you with the right frame and why these girls continue to wear their impractical clothes."

"They make them look lovely. Is that what you meant to imply, ma'am?"

"Your Excellency reads my mind like a book."

"And a delightful book it is, Madame Lucie, and in exactly the right kind of binding."

"Thank you, Monsieur Thomas."

"Your very good health, Madame Lucie."

"*Merci*, Monsieur Thomas, and yours."

But it was not only with Lucie that Jefferson was right away at home. He had been delighted to make the acquaintance of Erasmus, whose *Colloquies* and *Praise of Folly* he had read at college. With Jimmie, he at once got lost in a serious discussion of the metric system, which, however, did not lead very far, as both of them fully agreed that America had made a terrible mistake when immediately after the French Revolution it had failed to adopt the metric system and had stuck to the cumbersome old English method. But the metric system had been devised by revolutionaries, as Jefferson observed, and that, of course, had been enough to make it highly suspicious in the eyes of all good patriots who had prayed day and night for the defeat of the wicked regicides in Paris.

What made the author of the Declaration of Independence such an ideal guest was the fact that he was one of the most observant men we had ever met. He noticed everything, absolutely everything. He immediately remarked upon the macaroni in the soup, and this led to a discussion of the best way to feed the poorer classes, especially in the more backward frontier regions, where it was very difficult to avoid an almost unbearable monotony.

The olives in the duck's stuffing caused him to explain his own efforts to grow olive-trees on his estate in Virginia. And the champignons made him regret the conservatism of most people in the matter of food, which prevented them from eating all sorts of cereals and fruits which would

have been excellent for them from every point of view if only they had been able to overcome their foolish prejudices.

"Now take rice," he said. "It has marvellous food values. I experimented with rice all my life. It grows in the valley of the Po, and so there is no reason why it should not grow equally well in Virginia and in Georgia and in Kentucky. But our people would not eat it. They would rather starve than eat it. Take French endives. I imported them from France to take the place of the salads which do not grow so well in our hot climate. But it was hopeless. I did my best to make each of our farmers raise a few endives in their own gardens. They refused—every single one of them. None of that 'foreign fodder' for freeborn Americans.

"Then there was broccoli—a fine substitute for cauliflower. I raised some of it in Monticello, but my neighbours would not touch it. And there was this macaroni, which the Italians had found to be an excellent staple for those who had large families and were too poor to buy anything else. But even the poorest of my day labourers would have none of it. And think of the wines we could have grown! Wine, to my way of thinking, is one of the necessities of life and it is also the best antidote for the bane of whisky, that vile stuff which has killed more of our young men than all the wars we ever fought. I used to take my neighbours over my place and show them my vineyards. Then they went home and built themselves another still.

"And finally, there was a practical and handy kind of democracy I tried to introduce. It consisted of equal rights for all and special privileges for none. It was ideally suited for our soil, and I am convinced that we could have made it work too, if we had seen to it that each man had got his own little plot of land, for that is the only way to make any kind of democracy work. Give every man and woman a bit of soil they can call their own, and at the same time you will instil into them a feeling of responsibility for the whole of the community.

"Look at those big cities in France and England! I visited all of them when I was in Europe. I was not in a hurry. I spent considerable time in most of them. I studied them carefully. Ninety per cent. of the people who lived in those towns had nothing, never had had anything, and never would have anything they could call their own. Why should they have been interested in what happened to the other 10 per cent. or in the country as a whole? But the moment you gave them a few acres of land—even less—which they could really call their own, they were eager to work for it, willing to fight for it, and, if necessary, to die for it. I tried to make my friends in Congress see it that way, but as soon as I began to ride my hobby, they would smile vaguely and tell me they had a very

important appointment and would I please excuse them. And ~~they~~<sup>they</sup> would be, and I would not see them again until a week later."

Here Mr Jefferson halted abruptly and, turning to Lucie, said, "But I am afraid that all this must bore you, my dear ma'am, almost as much as it used to bore poor Alexander Hamilton."

Lucie smiled at him. "I thought that Your Excellency told me a moment ago that he did not like Mr Hamilton. Or did I read that in the book our host gave me last night?"

"Again, ma'am, you win. Pray forgive me for being so clumsy, and remember that I am a bit out of practice. It is a long time since I was engaged in one of these pleasant verbal duels. And now, if you will pardon me, I would like to propose a toast."

I got up, and addressing him directly, I said, "And if you will pardon me, sir, it is I and not you who will propose that toast. But I am sure it will be the same toast as you would have given, and so it does not really matter which of us speaks."

Then lifting my glass I said, "To the nation you founded, sir. May it some day become what you hoped to make it—a beacon of justice and fairness to guide all mankind towards a happier future."

Jefferson thanked me with a slight bow of the head. Then he remained silent for quite a while, but soon his ideas had become formulated. "I thank you for your gracious words, my dear fellow-citizen," he said, raising his own glass, "for with all my respect for your native land, which taught me much, I still feel that no greater honour can befall any man than to be called a citizen of our beloved republic. Yes indeed, I thank you, and from the bottom of my heart. You remarked a moment ago that I had helped to found a nation which you hoped might some day become a beacon of justice and righteousness. I noticed that you used the qualitative clause. Let me change that just a little. Let me express the firm conviction that it will actually do so, and ere long. And now enough of this, for here I am talking again as if I were delivering a speech in Congress and, as you know, I never was a believer in long orations. They are a waste of time and they settle nothing. So let us spend the rest of the evening trying to remember that God gave us this world for the express purpose of our being happy in it—all of us!

"You told me when I arrived that you had some special music for me. If the ladies won't mind, would you play it for me?"

At all our former parties we had begun the dinner with music so as to break the ice and make every one feel at ease. But to-night the talk had been so animated from the very beginning that I had told Hein to forget about his gramophone. I now asked him to turn it on and to start with Handel's *Water Music* while Jo passed the waffles. They had been

ght by a boy on a bicycle, and the poor lad was half frozen after his long trip through the snow, so we put him in the kitchen to get thawed out and to have his share of waffles, for although he delivered them every day, he rarely got a taste of his master's products. As for the rest of the party, we were in a mood of such perfect contentment with ourselves and with the world at large that we did not bother to move over to the fire but merely pushed our chairs back a little to make ourselves entirely comfortable and remained where we were.

In this way we passed the next hour, and then Hein turned on Bach's *Well-tempered Clavichord*. Jefferson listened intently. "What charming melodies!" he said. "I never heard them before. I don't know how they



escaped my attention. That first piece—it is so simple. I would have liked to play an obbligation to it."

"Perhaps you would care to do so now," I said.

"But you have only a piano, and I can't play it. I used to be a fiddler, but with that bad arm of mine, there is not much left I can do. Just the same, this is so much like olden times, I wonder whether you have a fiddle in this delightful house, where you seem to have everything else needed to make life happy and beautiful?"

"I have two violins here."

"You have? How wonderful! Will you let me see them? What are they?"

I took my violins out of their cases. I had brought them with me because I had anticipated—or rather, I had hoped—that something like this might happen. Mr Jefferson was especially delighted with the Amati, a very early one and therefore somewhat smaller than the later models. Not very powerful of tone, but with a most agreeable voice, like that of an Italian singer who has not been spoiled by the Scala or the Metropolitan.

"This one would suit me best, but my fingers must be terribly stiff after a hundred years without any practice."

The fingers proved to be less unobliging than he had expected, and he took the utmost delight in trying to discover how much he had lost and how much he had retained, and when the gramophone stopped he was so carried away by his own enthusiasm that he went on playing the simple tunes he remembered from his childhood days. I knew most of them too, and taking the other violin, the modest Serafino, I played the second part (making them up as best I could), and our concert might have gone on until the hour of departure, but at half-past eleven the telephone rang.

This was a most unusual occurrence, for the postmaster always went to bed at ten and never got up except in case of high emergency. All of us therefore felt that something very unusual must have happened, and as always on such occasions, we held our breath and while we pretended not to be listening, we tried to catch every word that was being said.

The call seemed to come from Amsterdam, and apparently it was Frits' partner who was talking. Their conversation did not last long, and then Frits told us that his partner had called him up to inform him that, according to the news on the Exchange that afternoon, Hitler would become Reichsführer the day after next or just as soon as old Hindenburg would be well enough to go through the necessary ceremonies.

Jefferson noticed our consternation and discreetly inquired whether anything very serious had happened. Perhaps we had lost a friend or relative?

"No, sir," I told him, "not exactly a relative, but a very dear friend. She is still alive, but God only knows how much longer we shall have her with us."

Then I hesitated. Should I tell him that the name of this friend was Liberty? Or should I spare him the grief of knowing that that ideal, for which he himself had so valiantly fought all his days, was on the point of being destroyed in every country of this earth and that it could not possibly survive unless our own beacon began to burn brighter than ever and right away, too?

I looked at Lucie. She understood. "Won't Your Excellency play us once more that tune he had just begun when he was interrupted?" she asked. Jo too, with her fine sense for the right thing at the right moment, felt that something must be done to allay his suspicion that something had gone very much wrong. She suggested a third round of waffles, but there were not any. The hungry boy had eaten them all, and he was now fast asleep. But there was still plenty of *slomp*, and the hot drink took Jefferson back to the days he had spent in the Low Countries, trying to





THOMAS JEFFERSON TRIED OUT MY BEST FIDDLE

raise funds for the Revolution, and he entertained us most amusingly with stories about the great-grandfathers of the men and women with whom we ourselves had grown up and in whom we recognized many of the characteristics of their ancestors.

That was all. As Veere houses had been built in the days before ventilation had been invented, the air in the room was growing pretty bad. We therefore opened the door. Outside the night was of a particularly clear beauty. Millions of stars were shining brightly. Our beloved village looked more peaceful than ever. Just before midnight Thomas Jefferson once more picked up my Amati.

"Do you by any chance remember this melody?" he asked, and he played us an old version of *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes*. I did remember it and once more played the second part while Lucie and Frits hummed the words.

A few minutes before twelve o'clock the bells of the tower chimed in with Valerius' *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. The violin began to sing softer and softer while the bells gradually increased in strength. In this way Thomas Jefferson once more slipped out of our lives. The clock struck twelve and we were alone with our thoughts. The noblest champion of freedom the world has ever seen was gone while the dread spectre of tyranny was rapidly descending upon earth.

Four days later I was on my way to America. Exactly five weeks later I was back in Veere. Nothing had happened. Outwardly everything was as it had always been. But a change had come over the world, and neither Frits nor I felt in the mood to go on with our dinner-parties. At least, not for the moment. Some other day perhaps, but not now.

"The music has gone out of our lives," as Jo so aptly put it when one day we were sitting in her kitchen and were finishing the last few drops of the cognac that had been left after Thomas Jefferson's visit.

"But no more weeping, if you please," she added. "Do you remember what our ancestors used to say when everything went wrong? *Ende desespereert niet*. Whatever we do, let us never despair. So here is to good health and here is to our love for each other and here is to hope."

Jimmie, Lucie, Frits, and I looked at each other and repeated Jo's prayer "Here is to hope!"

# Here Are the People we Invited, Together with the Chapters in Which They Make Their Appearance in This Book

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Concerning the PEOPLE in this book . . . none  
of the characters in this book  
is fictitious

JIMMIE is Mrs van Loon. She got her nickname shortly after she had graduated from Bryn Mawr. She became famous under it many years ago, and it has stuck to her ever since.

LUCIE is Mrs Lucie van Dam van Isselt, the very distinguished Dutch painter who lived for almost twenty-five years in Veere. We have not heard of her since the invasion of the Netherlands and we wish to heaven she had stayed on this side of the ocean when she visited us shortly before the outbreak of the war. As she loathed everything German, her fate cannot be a happy one, but we have been unable to get a word of news from or about her.

FRITS was Frits Philips, a member of the well-known Dutch tribe of radio and electric-bulb manufacturers. He himself was a banker by profession but with a very decided literary streak. He is no longer alive. His death was the result of his proverbial kindness. He had promised his small daughter to take her to the movies. It rained cats and dogs, and Frits, who had caught a cold, was told to stay at home. But he did not want to disappoint the child. He went, and a serious ear infection was the result. Everything was done to save him, but he never recovered from the operation. He lies buried in the cemetery of Zalt Bommel, the original home of the Philips dynasty. Perhaps it is just as well. The moment the Nazis had begun to look for the best beloved among the younger Dutchmen that they might murder them as an example to the others, they would have taken Frits prisoner and would have shot him as a hostage.

JO VERLINDE was the wife of HEIN VERLINDE, a local fisherman and a sort of small-town philosopher. Jo, being a most enterprising creature, ran the village boarding-house and on occasion (if she happened to like you very much) she would come and help out with the cooking. We hope that they are both still alive, but Jo may be obliged to feed the Nazi garrison of Veere and she will hate it.

KAATJE, our second maid, left us and married a workman in the Flushing shipyards. God only knows what has become of her since the Nazis invaded Walcheren and burned down Middelburg.

PERRELS was the village constable who by his own effort <sup>CHAD</sup> worked himself up to the post of keeper of the archives. He died several years before the war.

REPKO, for all we know, may still be shaving the good people of Veer selling them their cigars and their insurance, and officiating as town treasurer. He was a clever boy from Amsterdam with a cat's tongue in his head. We hope he has been careful not to offend present masters of our beloved village.

Little NOODLE survived many peregrinations and reached a happy <sup>ix</sup> age in the Nieuw Veere in Connecticut. He now sleeps content<sup>viii</sup> (with his little paws tucked away underneath his wise head) <sup>v</sup> behind the bird-bath in our garden, where he enjoys the company of all the birds in this part of Connecticut who take pride in keeping their plumage in shipshape order or who desire a refreshing drink.

As for VEERE itself, shortly after the invasion it almost was destroyed during an attack on near-by Flushing. Fortunately, the bombs fell into the harbour during low tide and exploded in the mud without causing very serious damage.





GREAT-GREAT-GRANDFATHER HAD BEEN A SOLDIER WITH NAPOLEON  
IN RUSSIA



health during the retreat from Moscow (he was lucky to come back alive at all), but financially, too, it meant his ruin. His business was gone, and he was obliged to begin all over again, and the struggle to make a living for his family in a country completely exhausted by twenty years of French domination, and from which every movable piece of valuable property had been taken away by the conquerors, proved too much for him. It took three generations to win back what had been lost. Yet until the very end, so my grandmother told me, the old man had remained loyal to the memory of his hero. He was happy to see his native land regain its independence. Occasionally he would even criticize the Emperor severely for the mistakes he had made during the latter half of his career. But he would always insist that if he were given the chance again, he would do exactly what he had done the first time.

"The Emperor knew best," he used to say, "but sometimes he was badly advised. He was betrayed by those who were supposed to be his friends. And he should have known moderation. But what will you? He was the Emperor!"

I knew this mysterious ancestor only from hearsay. All that was left of him were the buttons of the uniform he had worn when, broken in body, he had finally found his way back to his native village, not far from Rotterdam, and had settled down to his old profession of watchmaker. And so we were to meet one who had worshipped but had repented and one who had remained faithful unto the end.

A strange combination—the Emperor Napoleon, Ludwig van Beethoven, and a very humble link in the chain that connects me with one of those hundreds of ancestors whose dust has long since mingled with that of the land in which I was born.

Two of our guests arrived punctually. The third one (I need not tell you who) came a few minutes late, excused himself, looked at the familiar little figure in the worn-out old overcoat, but without any outward sign of respect, and said in his best Viennese, "*Gn' Abend, Majestät.*"

As for poor Grandpa, he had dressed up for the occasion in his best corporal's uniform, very much the worse for a century of moths. But he had somehow succeeded in patching up the worst holes, and his gun (God knows why he brought it, but he did!) shone as if he had been called out for an imperial inspection.

I wondered what Grandpa would do when he found himself under the same roof with the Emperor. I had been rather afraid that there would be a scene, that he would weep or shout "Hooray!" or something like that. But Grandpa behaved with great dignity. He presented arms and

waited until he was spoken to. The Emperor too immediately fell into his old rôle.

"What is your name, *mon brave*?" he asked.

The name was given.

"What regiment?"

The name of the regiment was given.

"What battalion?" The name of the battalion was given.

"Then you must have been at Borodino!"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"On the right flank?"

"Yes, your Majesty."

"Did you get wounded?"

"A shot through the left arm, your Majesty, but it amounted to nothing!"

"And you came back safely?"

"Yes, your Majesty. I lost three fingers of my left hand."

He held his hand out for the Emperor's inspection. Napoleon took it in both of his and said softly, "It is the hand of a brave man."

"Thank you, your Majesty. It is ready to fight for you again."

And that was all.

During the rest of the evening Napoleon treated the old soldier as one of his comrades in arms, addressed him as *mon caporal*, and even drank his health after we had sat down. Whereupon Grandpa (who proved to be really a very nice if somewhat simple person) lifted up his glass and said, "To the day of our revenge, your Majesty!"

It came as somewhat of a shock to meet such devotion in a person who had been dead for more than a century. It gave me cause to think. But then the whole of that evening upset so many of my former ideas that I shall never forget it. For during the next five hours I was to learn more about the so-called psychology of history than I had done during the previous forty years which I had spent with my nose buried in my books. I shall now relate what happened that others may profit by my own experience.

We started with a piece of Grétry, but we soon sent up word to Hein to stop the gramophone, for Napoleon paid absolutely no attention, and Beethoven apparently did not hear a note. In the beginning we had tried to talk to him, pretending we knew nothing about his deafness. But soon this proved to be hopeless, whereafter we resorted to short written communications during which I made myself popular with poor Ludwig

by my ability to render in pictures what others were obliged to express in words. But first of all, something about the dinner.

The meal was on the table, but Napoleon showed no interest in his food, and the only remark he made was about the dessert, the *petits pots de crème à la duc d'Enghien*. I had invented that dish in order to annoy him, but he failed to take it that way. On the contrary, he looked rather contrite when he saw that name.

"Poor Enghien," he said, looking straight at Frits and me. "I suppose I should not have shot him. Even at the time I felt that I was making rather a mistake. The world has never forgiven me. People have forgotten the hundreds of thousands of men who were killed in my campaigns, but they always harp on that one instance of my killing a young prince. And perhaps they are right. It was an error of judgment on my part. But when it happened I was so exasperated by the eternal plotting against my life by all these exiled royalists that I felt that some sort of counter-measure had to be taken to put an end to this nonsense. As usual, it was an innocent person who paid for the crimes of the guilty. But—*que voulez-vous?* That is past history now, and nothing can be done about it, but tell me, how do your people over here in the Low Countries feel about me to-day? I was their Emperor, too, for a good many years. Have they forgotten me?"

I told him that that would have hardly been possible in view of the tremendous damage he had done to the commerce of the Netherlands. For a moment he sat still, moving his knife up and down and this way and that, which seemed to be a habit with him, and then he answered, "Like everything else, it is one of those questions which cannot be answered without first answering a great many others. But let me show you." Whereupon he arranged the dishes of the table until we began to notice the outline of the map of Europe. This, of course, upset our dinner, but he did not seem to notice it.

"Look," he said, pointing at the fruit-bowl. "This is France. And now look at that" (pointing to the potatoes). "That is England. And that little butter-dish here is your own country. All the rest of Europe I had organized until it did my bidding. England was deprived of all revenue because it could not export a franc's worth of raw materials to the Continent. You might call it a sort of inverted blockade, but it worked. In order to make it work one hundred per cent. there must be no loopholes. Your ancestors provided the English with those loopholes. They absolutely refused to see the benefits that would come to them once England should have been destroyed, and they could have taken its place, for I give you my word, the first thing I would have done would have been to reconquer their colonial possessions and to return them to my Dutch

subjects. Had they only let me do this, to-day they would have been the richest people on earth."

I knew that he was lying, but somehow or other I did not quite find the courage to tell him so. Frits too was fascinated, and so we both sat very quietly as the Emperor continued his monologue. For the whole of that evening developed into an endless harangue by the Emperor. Beethoven was too deaf to follow the conversation, and Great-great-grandpa was too far gone in his admiration to say anything but an occasional, "How true that all is!"

Soon the table looked like a battlefield. Not a dish was in its place. For the Continental blockade was followed by the Emperor's campaign in the east, which had led to the destruction of Prussia. And after Prussia (to the despair of Jo, who no sooner had placed a dish on the table than it became Italy or Poland), we had to be shown how Wellington had failed to understand the situation in Spain and how the collapse of the French in Spain had been entirely due to the incompetence of brother Joseph, who had been pretty good at diplomacy but had been completely lacking in those administrative qualities which alone would have enabled him to dominate a people as difficult as the Spaniards.

Then followed a discussion of the wickedness of the English in bombarding and destroying the city of Copenhagen. The wickedness of perfidious Albion seemed to be his favourite theme, for it occurred again and again and it was only interrupted by sneering remarks about the stupidity of Tsar Alexander, who, if he had only known what was good for him, would have joined hands with the French Emperor, in which case the two of them, as Napoleon felt convinced, could have divided the whole of the planet between them.

And so it went while the food grew cold. Beethoven, despairing of getting anything more to eat, withdrew more and more into himself and began to wave his arms as if he were conducting an orchestra, and Frits and I sat speechless, for here we were learning our history (or, at least, one version of it) from the man who had been directly responsible for almost twenty years of bloodshed and destruction.

Finally, as there seemed no other way of putting an end to this deluge of words, Frits suggested that we should have our coffee in front of the fire, but this did not do the slightest good. The moment we had made ourselves comfortable, the Emperor helped himself to the pewter mugs and plates that were standing all over the room and used these to demonstrate the plans he had made for the good of Europe and for the ultimate benefit of all mankind.

It was a strange evening—a very strange evening. For shortly after eleven o'clock we at last had reached the subject of Russia. There, as we

discovered, the Emperor was in his element. "What a fool I was!" he shouted. "*Che coglione!*" (he often trailed off into his native Italian) "what an idiot I was ever to have trusted the reports of my Ambassador in St Petersburg. But my diplomatic representatives—*O Dio mio*—these fellows were the weak spot of my whole administration. Most of them belonged to the old royalist party. I had to use them because they knew how to ingratiate themselves with those insipid imperial and royal highnesses who still were to be found in so many parts of the Continent.



THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON EXPLAINING THE BATTLE OF BORODINO ON  
THE DINING-ROOM FLOOR

Those imbeciles refused to receive my so-called 'new men,' claiming that they had no manners and that they had been responsible for the death of some of their relatives or had deprived them of a few square miles of territory. As if knowing how to handle a cup of chocolate is the beginning and the end of all wisdom! My new men learned that trick fast enough whenever they had to and, besides, they had a way with the women which greatly appealed to the wives and daughters of those exalted gentlemen with their sixteen quarterings who were for ever reproaching me for having made my own way by my sword and some of the grey matter in my skull.

"How utterly stupid of me to have put any confidence in the reports of my Ambassadors!

"Of course, one of the main troubles was that I always had much too much to do. When I fought in Italy, in Egypt, in Germany, I did not have to run an empire. I was merely a general in command of a few

hundred thousand men. I had time to study my maps. Before I started on a campaign I knew every road, every river, the number of houses in every village. I knew where my heavy artillery could go. I knew where I could take care of my wounded. When I got to a place, even some God-forsaken hamlet in Poland, the whole terrain was as familiar to me as the streets of Ajaccio.

“In 1812 I had to leave that part of the campaign to others. That’s why I lost. Why hadn’t my embassy in Petersburg told me about those Russian roads? I should have remembered what Metternich once told me. He was a scoundrel, but a clever one. I should have prised him loose from my dear father-in-law in Austria. Then I should have won, and there never would have been a Waterloo. I should have won at Leipzig, and my great-great-grandson would now be on the throne of France.

“But, no, the Prince must stick to his silly old Vienna. He probably liked the Viennese women better than the Parisian ones, for which I don’t blame him. But it was Metternich—I am sure it was he—who once told me—I have forgotten when or where, but I distinctly remember what he said. I was talking about Europe. I was explaining my plans for Europe, and he smiled (he thought that he could make me uncomfortable by his superior way of smiling) and answered, ‘Europe, your Majesty! What is Europe? A little bit of land that stops where the post roads end.’ And he was right. Ten miles east of Vienna the post roads came to an end. What lay beyond was Asia.

“Still, I should have known better. I used to beat my enemies because always I knew just a little more than they did. I was grossly careless about Russia. I should have found out that the roads are mere ruts and that those ruts were a metre and a half apart. My wheel bases were some fifteen centimetres wider, so they never fitted into those ruts. The horses had to do twice as much work. They tired twice as fast. The fodder they had to eat was always wet, for the dew is heavy in that part of the world. They sickened and died. The wheels got bent and broken, and we had no spare parts. We should have had! We had no wheelwrights. We should have had them! Everything got slowed down, and I, who had always timed everything so perfectly, was three months late. Had I been in Moscow in July the war would have been over in August. Alexander could not have held out that long. My armies would have been back in Germany in October, and I should not have lost a hundred thousand men. As it was, I had to fight both nature and man. I defeated man, but nature defeated me.”

Here Napoleon paused and looked at us with the appealing eyes of a very small boy who has just tried to explain that, honest to goodness, he

didn't mean to smash that window he had broken with his ball, that it was not really his fault, that something had gone wrong, but please don't blame him, for he thought that he would miss that window by at least ten yards.

Then back again to Russia, with details about the battle of Borodino and long appeals to Great-great-grandfather, who had been there and could bear witness to the accuracy with which the Grand Army had functioned in taking its positions on that day, the bravery it had shown in maintaining those positions against overwhelming odds, and how the Emperor himself at noon, by taking the initiative at the right moment, etc., etc.

Then a few very uncomplimentary remarks about that tavern-keeper's son from Pau, who, having betrayed the man who had made him, who had given him glory and riches, was now a king on a throne of his own. "King of Sweden," the Emperor said, holding his nose as if some one had just thrown a handful of feathers into the kitchen stove, "but how did he get there except by going back on his word and selling out to the British? Well, I wish him joy with his lovely Désirée and I could tell him something, too, about that lovely Désirée! I knew her—I knew her well—in the old days in Marseille. Before she was Countess of Ponte Corvo. I wish him joy, and if it had not been for his damnable Swedes at Leipzig, I should very likely have won. I know. We were friends once. Great friends too! But when the crash came how many of those good friends had I left? Just one. My mother!"

The Emperor closed his eyes and sank his head on his chest. He trembled all over. He seemed to be on the point of bursting into tears. Frits and I looked on, completely fascinated. Here was acting in the grand old tradition. Talma would have been proud of his pupil, could he have watched this commonplace scene being elevated into something *à la* Hamlet with a final reference to the dear old mother. But it was very effective, and we now understood his success with an audience of simple people. Grandpa was completely taken in. As for Beethoven, he just sat there and never said a word. Occasionally we noticed that he took an old piece of music-paper out of his pocket, examined a few lines on it, then put it once more back in the inside pocket of his badly-fitting blue coat, which not only showed signs of many former repasts but also a few souvenirs from the meal of which he had just partaken.

I have no space for the rest of the story. For two solid hours the little man with the yellow face held forth. For two solid hours he acted the rôle he had so carefully studied those six agonizing years on St Helena, though at the time he must have known that it would never be anything but a paper rôle. For two solid hours he lied to us and didn't know it,



THESE OLD SOLDIERS HAD ARISEN FROM THEIR GRAVES TO PROTECT  
THEIR EMPEROR



for he had dramatized himself to such a point that he no longer was able to disassociate himself from the character he was enacting.

But the Emperor reached the highest point of his act when he turned from Hamlet to King Lear. Then we heard a story of such woe as had never been recited before. Everything that had gone wrong had been the fault of his enemies, who were also the enemies of mankind. He had loved the human race. He, who had caused the death of so many millions of his fellow-men, had never intended to hurt a fly. He shuddered at the thought of the ruined cities in the wake of his armies. The destruction of Moscow haunted him. Such a magnificent city, too, and sacrificed by malicious hands upon the altar of a misguided patriotism! What wouldn't he have done to set the Russian people free from their sad plight as wilful slaves of an Asiatic despotism! He would have given them liberty. He would have made them prosperous. He would have built schools for their children, hospitals for their women.

And then there was Europe! Poor old Europe, for ever divided against itself! He would have turned it into a confederation, something like that experiment of General Washington on the other side of the ocean. This plan too had been spoiled by perfidious Albion. And so we were back at the point at which we had started, and Wellington and Pitt were dragged out of their graves to stand before the bar of history and give an account of themselves.

It was at this point that Beethoven once more took that old piece of musical manuscript out of his pocket, asked Frits for a pencil, and scrawled something at the bottom of one of the sheets.

As for Erasmus, he had been singularly silent during the whole of the evening, but he now got up and excused himself. "I need some fresh air," he explained. "I shall step into the garden for a moment." Then the relentless clock across the street struck the hour of departure. Frits and I remained alone in the dark.

"Oof!" Frits said.

"Oof là là!" I answered, showing that I too knew my French.

But neither of us felt the need of any further conversation, and I slipped out and took the way for home. It had begun to rain, for the autumn was now well under way, and the weather was turning bad. The village lay asleep, but in the distance I saw a group of people hurrying down the road to Flushing. I took a side-street that was a short cut to the old cobble-stoned highway which, a hundred and thirty years before, Napoleon had caused to be built so as to move his troops from one end of our island to the other, in case of an English invasion. I hid myself behind the wall of a barn and waited. The little man with the cocked hat was walking rapidly in the direction of Middelburg. He was no longer alone. He was



**BEETHOVEN HAD FORGOTTEN HIS HAT AND AN OLD MANUSCRIPT**

marching at the head of quite a procession. His old grenadiers who had died on our island while fighting the British were following in his footsteps. They had crept out of their graves to escort their Emperor!

When I came to Frits' house early in the morning (for I had been much too excited to sleep), I found the dining-room as I had left it the night before. The table had not been touched, and the half-empty dishes and the empty glasses were standing in the same disorder in which they had been placed by the Emperor in his geographical and political demonstrations.

"I'm glad you came," Frits said. "I wanted you to look at something." He pointed to an object almost completely hidden by soiled napkins and two half-empty bottles of wine. "The old gentleman must have forgotten it when he left," Frits explained, "and I thought that you ought to be here when we look at that mysterious manuscript which seemed to worry him so much during the evening."

He picked up Ludwig van Beethoven's dilapidated high hat, as shabby a piece of headgear as either of us had ever seen on any human being, but so much a part of the man that we touched it most reverently. Then we spread the manuscript out on the table. It was part of the Third Symphony, the famous one known as the "Eroica."

On the page that attracted our special attention we noticed two lines of script. The handwriting of the master was like his music. Thought had run away with action. With the help of a magnifying glass we finally deciphered what had been put down in the year 1804, when Beethoven still believed in the destiny of Napoleon, the Hero who was to be the liberator of mankind, as he himself was to be the liberator of music from the bondage of outlived tradition. This is what we read:

"*Composita per festeggiare il sovvenire d'un grand' uomo.*" ("Composed to celebrate the memory of a great man.")

That great man had been Napoleon. We knew that when Napoleon crowned himself emperor, Beethoven, in an attack of fury, had struck out this dedication.

Then we noticed a few other words which, the night before, he had scribbled down on this piece of paper with the pencil he had borrowed from Frits. It took us half an hour to make out what they meant, but this is what they said in a mixture of German and Italian.

"I see no reason to revise my second opinion. *Non è veramente grande.*" ("He was not really a great man.")

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE GREATEST INVENTOR OF ALL TIME Puts Us to Considerable Inconvenience

**F**RITS said it was my fault, and I said it was his fault. We left the final decision to Jimmie, and she remarked, "Oh, well, I suppose it was just one of those things. If I were you I would forget about it. But the next time you should be a little more careful and not quite so romantic."

As a matter of fact, I don't think that it was a romantic streak which had got us into this unpleasant experience. Rather, I would call it some sudden impulse to be a little more modern—a little more up-to-date than we had been until then—that had made us send out this invitation we had addressed to the Greatest Inventor of All Time.

I know it sounded very boy-scoutish, but we had been entirely sincere when we expressed the wish to meet the man who, in the eyes of one better fitted to judge than we, had contributed most of all to the progress of the human race.

We had not the slightest idea who would knock at our door that next Saturday evening. We talked about it and did a little guessing. We even mentioned a few names—Edison and Barthold Schwartz, who by inventing gunpowder had given the average man of the Middle Ages a chance to hold his own against the ironclad warriors of the feudal castle. There had been other candidates, such as Marconi, who gave us wireless, and Wilbur Wright, who, together with his brother Orville, had enabled us to fly. We even had thought that Leonardo da Vinci might give us the pleasure of his company, although we feared that most of his inventions had been of a theoretical rather than a practical nature. But when Saturday came, we really had not the slightest idea whom we were going to meet.

Well, the joke was on us, and it was a pretty costly joke, for we had to pay for a lot of crockery, and had to settle a not insignificant bill for broken furniture.

As we had sometimes been able to meet our guests along the harbour or on the streets of Veere, Frits and I had decided that we would leave the house at half-past six and saunter forth to see what we would see. But Veere looked very much as it always did on a Saturday night in the autumn when the wind and occasional gusts of rain made most people prefer the warm comfort of the inside of their homes to the cold gloom of the big out-of-doors.

And so we went back to Frits' house that we might be there when our guest arrived. When we turned the corner of the market, we saw Jo and Hein standing on the stoop gesticulating wildly. "Hurry up!" Hein shouted. "Hurry up and help us turn the creature out before he ruins everything. And don't let the doctor come in. He would murder the old gentleman."

"What is it?" we called back, starting to run.

"Come and see for yourselves," Jo told us, moving a little farther away from the stoop.

Now neither Frits nor I are exactly what you might call 'heroes,' but as we knew both Jo and Hein to be the sort of people that did not easily get rattled, we realized that it must be something very serious and also, on account of our position in the community, we felt it our duty to show that we had a high conception of our duties as defenders of law and order.

What met our eyes the moment we entered the house was about as absurd a situation as either of us had ever witnessed. Practically all the chairs had been upset. The bottles on the table ditto. Wine had been spilled all over the floor. Several of our best dishes had been broken, and one of the candles had landed in a bunch of flowers and the leaves were smouldering, causing the room to be filled with a most unpleasant smell. At first, however, we saw no signs of any human presence, but Hein, who had followed us, pointed to the other side of the table and said, "Look! There it is!"

Indeed there 'it' was, and at first we had no idea what 'it' might be. It looked somewhat like a cross between a human being and one of the higher kinds of apes, but on the whole, the human traits predominated. It undoubtedly had a nose rather than a snout, but the forehead was as low as that of an orang-utan, and the whole of the face was covered with hair. So was that part of the body which was visible. As for the hands, they were claws rather than hands. We studied them with a sort of horrible fascination just as the creature reached upward, grabbed a leg of chicken (we had decided upon a simple chicken dinner for that evening, not knowing who was to come), and with a greedy gesture stuck it into its jaws.

As neither Frits nor I had any idea what language 'it' would speak, we stuck to Dutch, realizing that it would probably understand that tongue as little as any other, but we had to say something, and Dutch came easiest.

The only answer we got was an incomprehensible grunt and a rather sheepish smile which made it clear that our unwelcome guest was not only hungry but had also been very busy quenching his thirst. As evidence whereof we observed that a bottle of cognac which Frits had placed on



THE GREATEST INVENTOR OF ALL TIME HAD A MOST HEALTHY APPETITE

the table just before we had started on our walk was now completely empty.

"What are you going to do?" Jo asked, who was hiding behind us.

"Damned if I know," said Frits.

"Nor me neither," I added, being too much preoccupied with the situation to bother about such a detail as grammar.

Then Frits did a foolish thing. He picked up a heavy cane I had left at the house a few nights before—a beloved keepsake, for it once had belonged to that most generous of men, Richard Harding Davis, whose daughter had given it to me. He now waved it in the air and threatened the creature with it. At once the monster jumped to its feet and, making a horrible noise, he picked up a sharply polished piece of stone which must have been lying by his side and made ready to grab Frits by the throat. But, like a young dog, it seemed unable to focus its attention upon any given problem for more than a few seconds, and in the midst of its warlike preparations it noticed the chocolate cake that Jo had prepared for our dessert. The creature grabbed as much of it as its left hand would hold and squeezed it into its mouth.

Then it once more changed its mind, took hold of the table-cloth, pulled it down from the table, shook it so that this time all the dishes rolled across the floor, dragged it over its body as if it were a sheet, and went to sleep. A few minutes later it was snoring away for dear life.

I had no idea what would happen next, for we were absolutely helpless. Once before, we had been obliged to call in the police, and we did not want to do that again. It might lead to a lot of gossip, and we knew that the village was already beginning to talk about those strange goings-on in Frits' house on Saturday nights. Soon the authorities would begin to ask questions, and that, of course, would mean an end to our delightful dinner-parties, for scandal is the one thing heaven will not allow. Experience has shown that it cannot afford to do so.

Therefore our joy was great when, at the height of this crisis, the familiar figure of Erasmus appeared in the door. What did not quite please us was the happy mood in which he greeted us.

"My poor, foolish friends," he said. "I hope that this will be a lesson to you and that from now on you will be a little more specific when you send out your invitations."

"But, Doctor," Frits answered, "how could we have known that this would happen? We had merely asked for the greatest inventor of all time."

"Well, you got him."

"What! That thing that lies there, snoring like a drunken long-shoreman?"

“Yes.”

“What did *he* ever invent?”

“A mere trifle, but the one thing that gave us our chance to h  
own against the rest of creation.”

“What was that?”

“That bit of polished stone with which he almost cut your thro  
invented the knife.”

Do you want to know how the evening ended? Well, first of  
three of us sat down in front of the fire while Jo sent Hein out to g  
own Sundaysteak so that we should not famish and might regain our  
by having some solid food in our tummies. After Hein had come  
we gathered round the kitchen table and had our meal. It was  
comfortable sort of feast, for all of us ate with one eye firmly fixe  
the front room where the creature lay amid the debris of our  
china and slept and snored and snored and slept. At last, after a  
or so, the thing stirred. Then it got up, scratched itself, looked at u  
under its bushy eyebrows, relieved itself against the curtains, and  
walked out of the house. Exit our earliest ancestor.

We vowed that we would follow Erasmus' advice. There was to  
more guesswork. From now on, we would not only give the family  
of our guests, but their Christian names as well, and, if possible, the  
of their birth.

“And why not add their titles too?” Frits suggested.

I promised him that it would be done just that way, and at ha  
twelve I was home and in bed. But for the first and last time, dur  
the many years I lived in Veere, I locked our front door.



## CHAPTER XIV

### PLATO and CONFUCIUS May Seem to Make Strange Dinner Companions, But They Got Along Very Nicely and Seemed to Enjoy Themselves and Each Other

I HAD promised Erasmus that from then on I would add the Christian names of our guests when I sent out our invitations. But the very first time I tried to do so, I had all sorts of trouble, for neither Plato nor Confucius had been Christians, and even after a most diligent examination of a great many learned tomes I remained uncertain as to by what names their mothers had addressed them when they told them to come in, wash their hands and faces, and get ready for dinner.

No harm, however, was done by this omission. Everything came off as it should have, and this time there was no reason to shout for the police. Apparently there had been only one Plato and one Confucius in all history, and we got the right people, as we knew the moment they came into the room.

Both our guests were familiar to us, Plato from his statues and Confucius from his pictures, but even without such concrete advance information we could never have been mistaken in their identity, for both men seemed the incarnation of dignity.

But let me stick to my regular routine and first tell you what kind of meal we ordered for these strange guests.

I would hate to be a cook in heaven. So many people from so many parts of the world (decent heathens, too, are allowed in my kind of heaven), and running all the way from cave-men to penthouse dwellers, must be hard to satisfy, for what is Dutch *gehakt* to one is Philadelphia meat-roll to another.

So far, we had been rather fortunate in satisfying the tastes of all our guests, but I did not know how long our luck would hold out. Of the Chinese I knew nothing except that they are rice-eaters—at least those fortunate enough to eat at all. But my friends who have been in the Orient tell me that I must discard all my ideas about Chinese cooking in so far as these may have been derived from eating in chop-suey places in America. The Chinese have never heard of chop suey.

“Well, then,” I used to ask, “what do they eat?”

“They eat messy stuff.”

“Always?”

"Always."

"Like the rest of the East?"

"Exactly."

However, on the occasion of a more or less formal dinner given to one of the most formal of men who ever lived, I could not just open a lot of tin cans I had ordered from the Java store in Amsterdam and say, "Here you are, buddies—help yourselves." After a great deal of thumbing of my culinary library I finally came upon a dish that seemed perfect.

A pilau is one of the few blessings the Turks have bestowed upon the West. It can be made out of almost any kind of meat or fowl, and the rice would be just the thing for Confucius. I had no idea about Plato's preferences, but, being a Greek of the fourth century B.C., he would undoubtedly be a very abstemious sort of person, and we would have plenty of olives for him in case the pilau was not satisfactory. When Jo asked what to put into the pilau I told her to use chicken. For I happen to prefer chicken to beef and veal. I hate lamb in every shape and form, and I am not allowed to eat pork. In this way I should be certain that I myself would get what I wanted, and that is about as good a principle for a host to follow as any other I can think of.

Celery seemed to suggest itself as the most logical of vegetables for an occasion of this sort. *Apium graveolens* is a harmless kind of weed which rarely provokes man's passions into the violence caused by mentioning either spinach or cauliflower. Furthermore, it was held in high esteem by the ancients as a mild aphrodisiac. This might not recommend it to Plato, who, according to his most trustworthy contemporaries, was too deeply engrossed in his political, scientific, and social contemplations to have any spare time for studying the interesting problems connected with applied biology.

There was to be no regular dessert, but I intended to have the table full of small dishes filled with all the rather messy things we could buy at any store dealing in Oriental candies—bits of nougat, Turkish delight, Algerian sweetmeats, and whatever else we could find that was highly sugary. Wines? I had no idea. But neither of our guests would be conscious of the pressed grapes, and we had a lot of odds and ends of bottles bought for previous occasions. In this way we would be able to save some money, and these dinners, as we were beginning to notice, were running into much higher figures than we had expected. Not that we minded. They were the best investments both Frits and I had ever made, and when the crash came (as it did shortly afterwards) we at least had had something for our money.

Problem No. III. How about music?

Of Greek music I knew nothing, and the Chinese music I had heard in

the East had always made me feel as if some one had been filing saws. But I remembered that both Plato and Confucius had greatly stressed the importance of music in their respective systems of education and that they had preferred flutes to all other instruments. I did not want to experiment with pipes of Pan and other instruments used in supposedly 'classical' records with which the market had been flooded recently by a number of German professors who at last had 'discovered' how Greek music should be played. I had heard the *Hymn to Helios* and the *Hymn to Kalliopeia*, but they had not struck me as the sort of thing to which a person with a more or less cultivated ear would like to listen for more than a few minutes. In which, of course, I merely showed the arrogance of modern man, who forgets that the music which makes us weep in 1942 may impress our descendants of 2942 as unfavourably as the music which made the people of the year 942 swoon with delight happens to affect us.

Not that I have the slightest objection to the flute, which is a noble instrument in the hands of an expert (and there are about a dozen of them in the world). On the contrary, the flute, when kept within reasonable bounds, is a joy to the ear, and an orchestra without a couple of good flutes would be as flat as soup without salt. Its literature is decidedly limited, of course, but there are lovely flute parts in several of Mozart's quintets and sonatas, and both he and Bach have written flute concertos which have a delightful and quite refreshing quality. I ordered some of these from Amsterdam, together with the "Brandenburg" Concerto No. 5, in D major, in which a little, very high-pitched kind of flute, now usually replaced by a trumpet, plays hide-and-seek with the melody and manages to do this with such humour and gaiety that I have adopted that record as my special remedy against those fits of melancholia which are the result of reading the latest news from the dark hinterland of Nazi Europe.

And then came the moment when I had to sit down and play Plutarch and write something about our next guests. I did not find it easy. Like most supposedly educated Europeans, I knew practically nothing about the man who for the last two thousand years has given what are in some ways the wisest people on earth that philosophy of life which has enabled them to exist with a fair degree of happiness in the midst of an accumulation of miseries and indignities such as has never been experienced by any other nation. As for Plato, I had gone through so many ups and downs in my feelings towards the founder of the science of statecraft that I never quite knew where I stood or what I could answer when some one said, "Ah, yes! Plato!" At times I have liked him enormously and have admired him as the most important thinker of the ages, but there also have been intervals when he was nothing more to me than a clever

weaver of words and a not very heroic exponent of certain theories of government which had no connexion whatsoever with the world as it happened to be. But my peaceful years in Veere had put me into a sort of contemplative mood in which I was better able to understand what Plato had tried to prove.

It should be remembered that the Plato we know was much more appreciated during the Middle Ages and Renaissance than during the centuries following immediately upon his death. For Greece had ceased to exist as an independent nation. The Greek people had deliberately committed suicide by their everlasting quarrelling among themselves and by their attempts to establish a working democracy in a society of which 90 per cent. of the population were slaves.

Plato, therefore, was not unlike those modern European students of statecraft who spin their yarns about an ideal state, with one eye on the Gestapo and the other on the nearest exit to the Lisbon clipper and the U.S.A. Five hundred years from to-day we may discover their books in the places where they now lie hidden and then we will be astonished at the brilliant way in which those moderns had discussed the methods by which it might have been possible to save European civilization. But we also know that nothing came of their beautiful dreams because reality overtook them before they had finished their tasks and had thrown them into those concentration camps from which they were never again to emerge and in which they died of neglect, brutality, and starvation.

Plato, too, wrote his guide-book to applied politics at the very moment when it could no longer be of any practical use to anyone. Shortly after his death the great tyrant from the north gobbled up the whole of the eastern world, and Greece was reduced to the rank of a seventh-rate province, and an insignificant part of that vast Macedonian empire which a few years later, was to reach from the Danube to the Indus. Plato therefore worked in a void. The glory of the age of Pericles, when Athens had dominated the ancient world, was still vividly remembered, but so was the shame of the years immediately afterwards, when the barbarians from Sparta, who had always believed in converting their butter into spear-points, deliberately destroyed what the Athenians had so painfully built up and left the city, once presided over by Pallas Athene, a mere ruin, its walls gone, its public buildings destroyed, and its population decimated by the plague.

But while it had been possible to destroy the physical part of the city which for four long centuries had been the centre of ancient civilization, it had proved much more difficult to extinguish that beacon of "enlightenment through actual observation" which the Athenian scientists and philosophers had erected on the shores of the Ægean Sea. And while

Athens ceased to exist as an independent political unit, it continued to be the most important centre of education of the Old World. From all over the Mediterranean bright young men in search of the best pedagogical opportunities would sooner or later find their way to the city on the Bay of Ægina and for centuries after the Athenians had ceased to function as an international power and a commercial metropolis, eager students from Europe, Asia, and Africa would travel to the land of Attica, that in one of its many academies of learning they might prepare themselves for the difficult business of living.

Universities, in our sense of the word, were not to make their appearance until many centuries later. Teaching was still very much a matter of Mark Hopkins sitting at one side of a log and a student at the other. Except that the scholars, who had often been obliged to acquire the necessary sums of money for their tuition at great sacrifice, were serious young men who knew exactly what they wanted and who came to Athens not merely to get a degree and thereby qualify themselves for membership in the University Club after their return to Rome or Alexandria. They went to Athens in search of the best products then available on the educational market and shopped around until at last they found what they were looking for. After they reached their destination they paid a very considerable sum for the privilege of being allowed to follow the lectures of the *magister* who presided over the establishment of their choice, and they sat at his feet to listen and to ask questions and to debate with him upon every possible subject beneath the heavens and earth, until in the end they too might perhaps catch sight of a few of those eternal verities which only reveal themselves by the light of the sparks that are struck by a conflict of first-rate brains.

No attempt was made by these Athenian pedagogues to put together what God had put asunder, and if a student lacked the natural talent which was believed to be a prerequisite for successful work within the realm of the arts and sciences, he was not tolerated for very long. His teachers might feel sorry for him, but if the boy lacked the necessary grey matter, he was told to become a good, reliable carpenter or stone-mason but not to strive after a worthless Ph.D.

I suppose that, being human, they would occasionally allow the not very brilliant son of a rich Roman war profiteer to bribe his way into their schools. But this permitted them to bestow free scholarships upon poor boys in whom they had detected exceptional ability, and so no great harm was done, for the standards were never lowered until much later, when the world had been made safe for the meek and the humble and when the proud of spirit were made to feel that there was no longer any room for them in this world.

Now let me give you a few dates to fix Plato's activities definitely on your mind. He was born in or about the year 427 B.C., two years after the death of Pericles. In 404 Athens, after a war of almost thirty years, surrendered to Sparta and lost its walls and its navy and its leading position among the small nations that went to make up ancient Hellas. A decade or two after 400 Xenophon wrote his dullish book which all little boys who have studied Greek these last twenty-three hundred years have had to read and which I mention only to show how far the Greeks had fallen from their former high estate. Ten thousand Greeks were obliged to hire out to the Persians as mercenaries. A hundred years before, they themselves would have done the hiring.

Meanwhile Athens was passing rapidly through all sorts and kinds of government, from a not very happy experiment with a short-lived oligarchy to an even more disastrous interval of pure democracy, when the fair name of Athens was for ever disgraced by the judicial murder of Socrates.

That happened in the year 399, and Socrates of course was the teacher of Plato. Use this year 399 as the peg on which to hang the whole development of Plato.

Plato made three trips to Syracuse to which he was called as a consultant in political matters by the tyrant who was then at the head of the Government of this old Corinthian settlement. At that time Plato still seemed to have lived under the delusion that some time—somewhere—some great leader would arise who would send for him in a letter, reading somewhat as follows:

MY DEAR PROFESSOR:

You are supposed to know more about government than any other living human being. I have everything under control here. I run this town, and everybody knows that I am the boss. No rich businessman can put anything over on me because he has bought up the local legislators, as there is no legislature which can be bought. No cheap demagogue can so much as open his mouth or grab a few millions by forcing himself upon the local labour unions, for I don't allow any. I see to it that the working-man gets decent wages and is fairly treated, and therefore he needs no organization to force the employers into doing the right thing by him. We have an army and a navy, but any officer who ever is seen to talk to one of our former politicians is hanged right away.

As for our women, they enjoy the same rights as the men. The bright ones are not held in any greater respect than their less intelligent menfolk merely because they happen to be women. We recognize the necessity of continuing the population, but we take motherhood for granted as something that is part of nature, like rain or sunshine or the

duty of the respectable citizens of the male persuasion to shave themselves every day.

As for the children, you will, of course, be expected to devote a great deal of your time here to a study of our schools. We want to make them the best possible training schools for life, both from a practical and a theoretical point of view. But in giving every child its chance, we do not want to favour the duller pupils at the expense of their brighter classmates. Even I, the tyrant of this town (which I think you will find greatly improved since your last visit, as we have got rid of all tenelements and have hanged all racketeers)—even I realize that all people are born equal. The only trouble is that they never stay equal for more than a few hours or days. After that, as far as I am concerned, each one must follow his own destiny, for I do not want to be brighter than the gods who seem to have predestined some of our poorest and least favoured infants to rise to unexpected heights, while others, who came into this world with every possible advantage, remain numskulls all their livelong days and die on the gallows or in the poorhouse.

I therefore expect you to rearrange our school system upon such a basis that every one of my subjects will be given a chance to function to the best of his or her abilities and may derive the greatest possible amount of satisfaction from his residence on this earth and will be able to do so without cluttering up the road of progress by futile efforts to do more than he can do, merely because such a course of action satisfies his own vanity.

There are many other problems but these I hope to discuss with you when you reach Syracuse. I shall, however, mention a few—public health, some kind of system that will prevent the mentally and physically unfit from breeding like rabbits and filling our lunatic asylums and poorhouses with a cargo of humanity which the ship of state is by no means able to carry. But of these things—as I just said—I will speak after your arrival, and in the meantime I remain your well-disposed

DIONYSIOS, TYRANT

Some such letter may actually have been written, for Plato, as I told you, paid three visits to Syracuse. But he had to suffer the same disappointment as Confucius when, two centuries before, that good and wise man had gone forth in quest of his own 'intelligent prince.'

On paper, the schemes of both philosophers looked entirely plausible. But when it came to a practical realization of their plans, the human race obstinately refused to live up to all such parchment theories. It went its own sweet way regardless of the logic of the philosophers, and Plato, for ever haunted by the fate of his beloved Socrates (the most intelligent of all Athenians, ruthlessly destroyed by the lowest elements of society), and not being much of a hero, decided to refrain from all direct action and to

devote himself exclusively to training a few choice disciples in the science of statecraft.

He lived to be almost eighty years old, but he spent the latter half of his life as the head of a private school and never got himself mixed up with local politics.

This institute of the higher learning was situated in a grove near Athens. This grove was consecrated to the memory of Academus, the Greek hero who, according to legend, had told Castor and Pollux where Theseus had hidden Helen. Outside his academic labours, Plato found time to write the thirteen epistles and the thirty-five dialogues in which he discussed every possible problem of life (and therefore of politics and statecraft) which for one reason or another struck him as a fit subject for debate with his students.

The esteem in which these 'conversations' were held is perhaps best demonstrated by the fact that practically all of them have survived. Whereas the greater part of ancient literature has been irredeemably lost (including some of the holy books of the early Christians), the works of Plato were always most carefully preserved. Even during those chaotic centuries which followed in the wake of the fall of Rome, when the new creed not merely murdered some of the most distinguished exponents of the old Platonic philosophy but also burned their books wherever they found them, there were always a sufficient number of faithful Platonic scholars to hide at least enough copies of these priceless treasures to save them for posterity.

As a result we are thoroughly familiar with the ideas of this greatest of the writers of antiquity, and there never has been a moment during the twenty-three centuries which separate us from Plato when he has failed to influence at least a few of the brighter spirits of our race. For example, we find traces of Plato in the writings of most of the founding fathers of the Church. The medieval scholastics, in spite of their devotion to Aristotle, were very apt to be influenced by Plato, and the eighteenth century, the great age of universal enlightenment, was thoroughly Platonic, in spite of its endlessly repeated love for the average man. To-day, amid the fury of conflicts let loose by that antithesis of Plato's ideal of the true leader (I am sorry, but I have to refer once more to Adolf Hitler), the name of the great Athenian has been somewhat eclipsed by the prophets of violence and cruelty who now seem to be in full command of the situation. But watch my words! The moment some semblance of reason returns to our unfortunate planet, Plato will again come into his own.

It is true that at times he will exasperate us by being entirely too academic and by behaving as if he lived in a vacuum and had never heard of the human race. But that is merely one of the 'defects of his qualities,'



and his qualities are so great that we can easily overlook a few of the defects, for it is those qualities which have kept Plato's books alive and fresh for more than twenty-three centuries. Homer, of course, goes back still farther, but otherwise how very few writers there are (especially upon philosophical subjects) who are not hopelessly dated after the passing of a single generation! Whereas Plato, when he really lets go and is able to forget for a few moments that Socrates was put to death for much less than he is telling his pupils, sounds as if he were writing from Washington, D.C., or some other modern capital, and were writing to-day instead of in 370 B.C.

Take certain passages in his *Republic*, which was really a kind of Utopia before the Utopias had been invented as a form of political criticism. Having just lived through the terrible experience of seeing his beloved Athens go to ruin (and entirely through its own fault), he has Socrates, who is the hero of so many of his dialogues, discuss the vicious circle which makes it apparently impossible for mankind to escape from the bondage of its own political follies.

Here is part of the story. The old stone-cutter (for that was the trade which Socrates had learned from his father) has just paid his compliments to the plutocracy which has come to power when Athens became the richest city of the ancient world. "These new men of business," so he says, "keep up the pretence of never noticing those whom they have already ruined and they contrive to insert their sting—which in their case is their money—into anybody who is not constantly on guard against them. But by this method they succeed in recovering their original investment every time while at the same time they make drones and paupers of everybody outside their own class. They will continue doing this until the people at last see the danger that threatens them. Their despair gives them courage. They arise against their oppressors and triumphantly declare the victory of Democracy over Tyranny and Plutocracy.

"In the first flush of victory they kill many of their opponents, send a few more into exile, and then settle down to show the survivors how the world should really be governed. But soon the democrats turn out to be as the plutocrats and the tyrants had been before them. They use the power of their numbers to get a majority at every election and then they do as they please because whatever they decree is based upon a 'legal majority.' Therefore they are entirely within the law when they divide all offices among themselves and when they keep the people happy by a constantly increasing number of doles.

"Of course, in order to retain the good will of the masses, they are obliged to do something the tyrants and the oligarchs can dispense with.



THERE, AT THE FOOT OF THE ACROPOLIS, PLATO HAD DONE HIS TEACHING

They must flatter the mob, and as a result all standards are debased by an increasing amount of vulgarity. Manners too are coarsened because there is no one to show them any better, and soon it becomes apparent that just as the mad pursuit of wealth must eventually destroy oligarchy, in the same way the excess of liberty must destroy democracy. And then there is another period of decline, for, in such a state, anarchy gains until it presently finds its way into all private houses and even ends by getting hold of the animals. Fathers get accustomed to descend to the level of their sons, and the sons behave with insolence towards their fathers, as they no longer have any fear of them. The teacher begins to stand in awe of his pupils, and as a result the pupils despise their teachers. From that moment on, young and old are equal, and the young are ready to compete with the old both in word and deed, while the old feebly imitate the young. In the end, all horses and donkeys begin to march along with the rights and dignities of freemen, and everything is just ready to burst with liberty.

"And what is the result?

"That the excessive increase of this so-called liberty causes a reaction in the opposite direction, for an excess of liberty, whether in nations or in individuals, seems duly to pass into slavery, and the most aggravated form of tyranny arises invariably out of the most extreme form of liberty, for the moment liberty becomes licence, dictatorship is near. The rich, afraid that the prevailing democracy will rob them of their last farthing, begin to think of ways and means to overthrow their enemies, and at that moment some enterprising leader is apt to seize power. He does this by promising everything to the poor. Then he surrounds himself with an army, kills first his opponents and next those of his friends who might be dangerous. Having purged the state, he establishes himself as tyrant—as sole ruler.

"And under such conditions," as Plato (in the rôle of Socrates) is careful to point out, "there is no longer any room for the philosopher who preaches moderation and mutual understanding. The poor philosopher is now like a man fallen among the wild beasts and, if he is wise, he will retire, while there is still time, and take shelter under a wall while the storm passes by."

And there you have the *leitmotiv* of Plato's whole career. While the storm is raging, there is nothing the man of a contemplative turn of mind can do. Let him take shelter and there prepare for the day when the people will perhaps listen to reason. He emphasizes the 'perhaps,' for like Confucius he is not quite certain whether that day will ever come. But don't go out on the ramparts and take an active part in the battle. Any well-trained gladiator—some half-witted but strong-armed barbarian

carefully trained to the use of arms—will be infinitely better at the business of fighting and killing than a man who has spent all his life playing with ideas instead of bombs. It is not cowardice that makes the philosopher take this step. It is his sense of the fitness of things, for he realizes that, being a doctor of the soul, he is in a way not unlike the doctor of the body, who is also found behind the lines and not in the front ranks.

Having settled those matters to his own satisfaction and finding that his ideas worked (at least on paper), Plato concentrated all his efforts upon trying to discover how the human race could be made to behave according to the laws of reason, by what methods those elements which might be dangerous to such a development could be eradicated, and how the perfect state could be established in very much the same way as a better breed of horses or cows or pigs or sheep or bees or grain could be developed out of the inferior varieties with which the world was only too familiar.

A most noble and most praiseworthy idea! And one with which the greatest minds of all times have occupied themselves at some period of their lives. Some of them approached it from the solemn and dignified angle, which was so characteristic of Plato. Others, like the carpenter-teacher from Nazareth, tried to solve the difficulty by placing the human race under the direct superintendence of God. Still others, like Voltaire and Dean Swift, chose satire as their mode of attack. Thomas More thought he could do most good by putting a sort of china egg into mankind's nest—a china egg he called Utopia. Descartes endeavoured to give us a solution by an application of pure mathematics. Spinoza gave it an ethical twist. Karl Marx took economics as his particular field of research. Rabelais clowned everything in a world of his own making. And there have been all sorts of philosophers, sages, and master-minds (genuine and not quite so genuine) of the in-between variety who starved in garrets and died in cellars, that they might bestow upon their fellow-men a blueprint of salvation, searching heaven and hell for an answer to the all-important question, "How can we possibly save mankind from itself?"

But in the end they were like Omar the Tentmaker (one of the most interesting and stimulating of all the seekers after truth), who summed up his own lifelong investigations in this simple quatrain:

Myself when young did eagerly frequent  
Doctor and Saint, and heard great argument  
About it and about: but evermore  
Came out by the same Door as in I went.

Ever since I began to interest myself in the men who fought so violently to take mankind definitely out of the class of the animals by providing it

with a code of conduct based upon some principle that would be fool-proof, I have been struck by the fact how deeply every one of them was influenced by his own political and social background. Spinoza, although brought up in the atmosphere of a very strict Judaism, took the government of the Dutch Republic as the norm for his ideal state. Voltaire, when he made *Candide* utter what was really his own creed, "Let us cultivate our own garden," revealed himself as a good Frenchman. Plato, in giving us his ideal republic, basically revived the Athenian commonwealth as it had been carried to its highest degree of perfection by Pericles. For when we come down to the core of the Platonic system, what do we find?

Plato believes that it is possible to evolve a state which will be happy and prosperous and able to live in peace with all its neighbours if every citizen can be persuaded to 'do his part' to the best of his own abilities. In that way, the nation will acquire a basis of justice and righteousness upon which everything else can then be firmly founded.

He realizes that such a conception was a little too vague and therefore gives us a definite four-point programme for the attainment of his brand of civic virtue. That four-point programme sounds as follows: every citizen must be imbued with a sense of justice, a sense of piety, a sense of reasonableness, and a feeling of courage that when the occasion arises he will fight bravely to maintain the safety of the common country. Once he has acquired those four civic virtues, the citizen can no longer go wrong. He will be like Immanuel Kant, standing ready to meet all the vicissitudes of life, with the starry heavens above him and a copy of the categorical imperative in his hand.

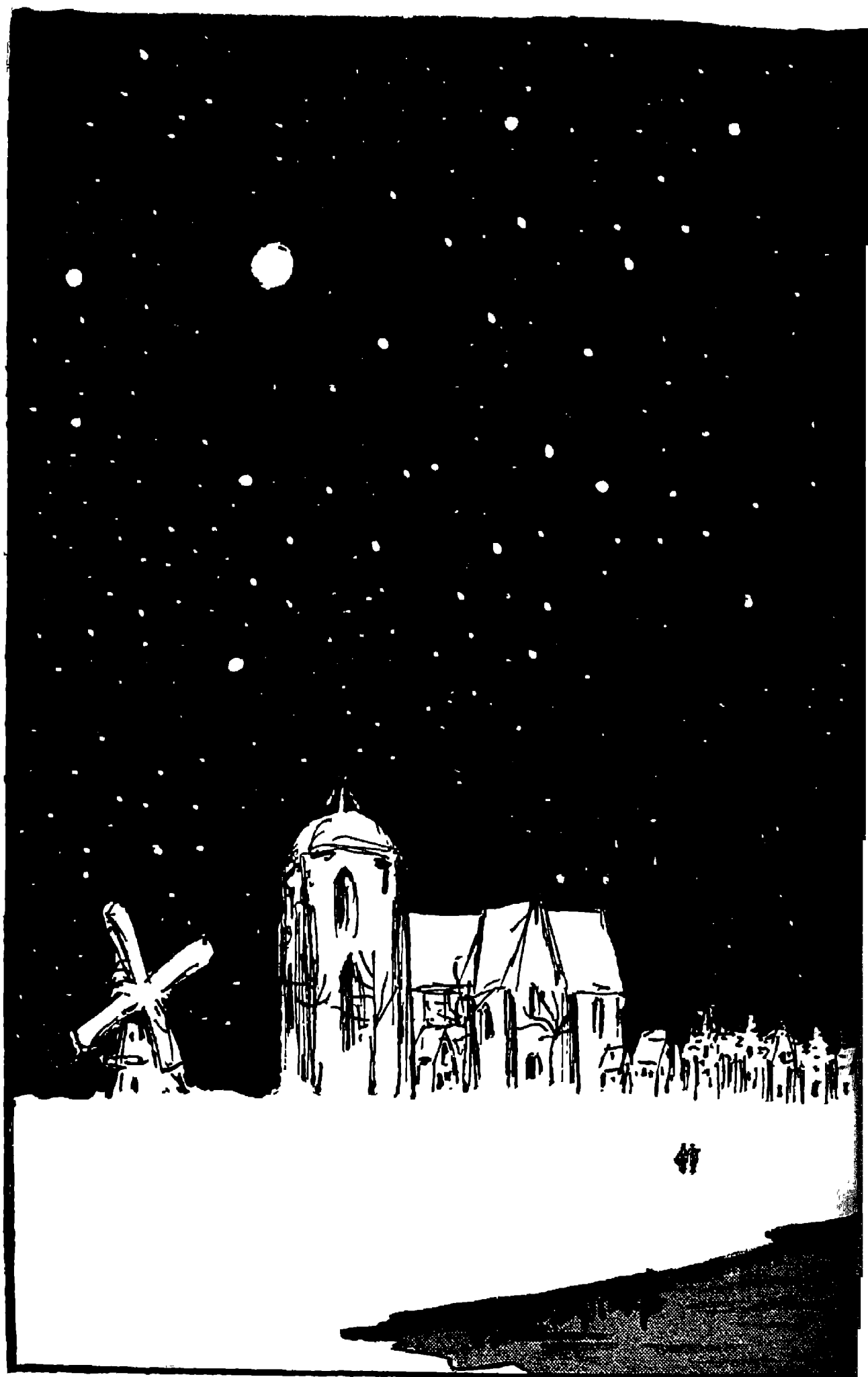
Plato, like all the other philosophers of antiquity, including the Jewish ones, almost never shows any serious interest in the economic aspects of life. His physical needs, like those of all Greeks, Romans, Jews, and the other peoples of the Mediterranean, were few. An adobe house offered him all the shelter he needed. He could teach underneath the branches of some spreading olive-trees, for it was never sufficiently cold to drive him and his pupils inside a steam-heated lecture-hall, just as Jesus was able to address his fellow-men from any convenient hillside. Again, like all other Greeks, he could eat sparingly because he lived in a warm climate and was not obliged to stoke up, like a teacher in some New England college. Clothes too were not a heavy item of expense. But even more important than that, the existence of an almost unlimited and extremely cheap labour supply, consisting of slaves who, once they had been bought, cost next to nothing for their further upkeep, made it possible for the few thousand Greek freemen to devote themselves entirely to the service of the State.

But what would become of the leisure which made it possible for them to do this—to exist free from all economic cares—what would become of it when a new tide set in and deprived them of their economic security? Plato never even seems to have considered such a possibility, and that, it seems to me, was his greatest weakness. Even in his own little world (and, after all, it was a very small world compared with what was to follow), where it would have been comparatively easy to educate the few thousand free people who made up a Greek state, war and violence had been the order of the day. What would happen when Christianity, having preached the doctrine of human equality, should rid the world of slavery (even if it took some nineteen centuries to do so) and when hundreds of millions of other men and women should feel the necessity of some actual participation in affairs of State?

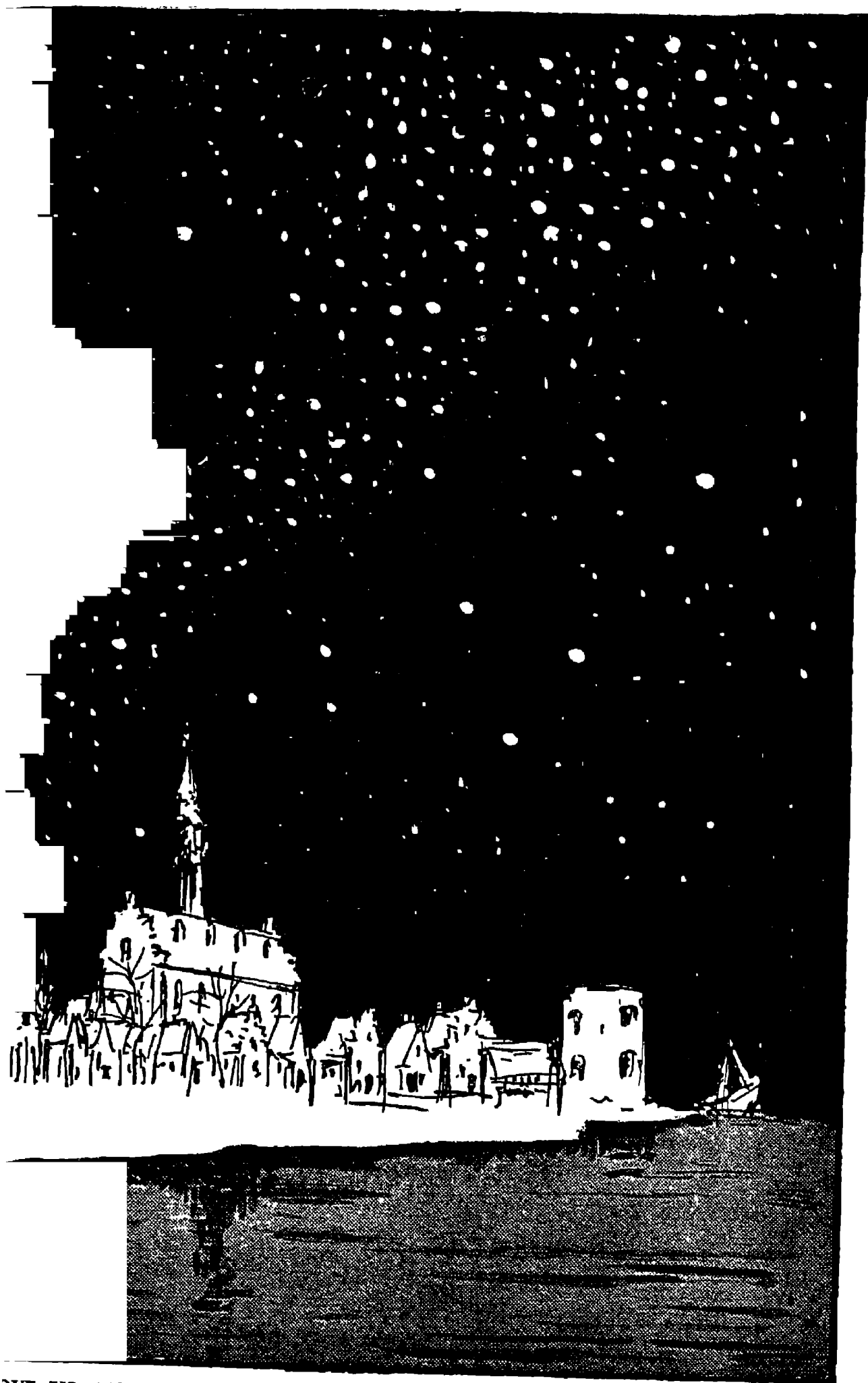
American history throws a very illuminating light upon this problem. As long as we were merely thirteen small colonies in which practically everybody could know everybody else, it was possible for a small group of leaders, animated by the four Platonic virtues, to run the republic. The Washingtons, the Adamses, the Jeffersons, and the Madisons had been deeply influenced by the philosophy of Plato. All of them were still profoundly conscious of their duty towards the State. From childhood on, it had been hammered into their heads that since they had been born with certain advantages over their fellow-men, they were also expected to exert themselves more than these other less fortunate ones and that they therefore must become shining examples of courage, justice, reasonableness, and piety—in the broadest sense of that oft-misused word. In short, each one was not only aware of the Bill of Rights, which was part of the law of the land, but also of an unwritten Bill of Duties, which was an inseparable part of his own code of ethics. And because they moved and had their being in small communities it was possible for their neighbours to weigh them carefully on the scales of public opinion and to accept them or reject them as they deemed fit and necessary.

Therein, I believe, lies the greatest weakness of all the Platos from the fourth century B.C. until about a hundred years ago. Conditions have changed so completely that there is no longer any safe basis for comparison. But there is another Plato, less well known to most people and often entirely unsuspected. That is the Plato who, having studied individual men and having observed them as they react to certain political and social stimuli, thereupon goes behind and beyond them and tries to come to some understanding of the invisible forces which have made them what they are, who finally tries to reduce these many forces to a single source—to God.

As a small boy I was taught that the Jews, and after them the Christians,



STANDING THERE, LIKE IMMANUEL KANT, WITH THE STARRY HEAVEN



DVE US AND THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE IN OUR HEARTS



were the only people who had ever believed in a single God and that therefore they were superior to the followers of every other creed, including even the noblest of the old philosophical systems. I accepted it as most children will accept almost everything they are taught. Not because they feel very strongly either one way or the other (how could they with their limited experience?), but because they have at least learned this bit of wisdom: "Why argue with grown-ups who never understand anything, anyway?" Since then I have (without ever having felt deeply attracted by any religious subjects) carefully endeavoured to find out whether this was really so and whether it was really Jesus who first of all spoke to us about a single heavenly Father.

It is true that the Greeks and the Romans never saw their own Supreme Being in the rôle of a father, for he was guilty of too many cruelties towards his children to qualify for that rôle. But they had long since passed beyond the stage where they still held any belief in the stories they had been told as children: how Pallas Athene had stepped forward, full-panoplied, from the brain of Zeus, how Pan loved to frighten lonely wanderers by making disgusting noises in the bushes by the side of the road, how all the gods had taken sides in the Trojan War and had fought in a war which, deprived of the glamour which Homer's name had bestowed upon it, had been nothing more than a highly undignified quarrel about a woman whom one man had stolen from another. They did not proclaim their disbelief in public. No more so than we of to-day—who feel completely indifferent to such doctrines as infant damnation and transubstantiation and transfiguration—express our opinions upon these subjects except among our own friends. We should merely hurt the feelings of lots of perfectly nice and kind and good people to whom these words still mean life and death, but we would most certainly not be able to make them change their minds by mere arguments. Therefore, in Plato, one does not come across any overt attacks upon the prevailing superstitions of his own time. He mentions them casually, but never makes them a point of issue. Instead of which, he follows the much more intelligent course of leaving the gods where they are, living invisible lives on their snow-covered mountain-top, and then he proceeds to erect the image of his own deity on a distant plateau which is so high and inaccessible that few people will ever care to penetrate that far.

Those few are, of course, among the hardest souls of the community for whom no exertion is too great if it promises to bring them a little closer to the final truth. The rest of humanity may eventually decide to follow these stout-hearted pioneers, but Plato is not quite sure whether such a course would be entirely desirable.

Our modern students (judging by quite a number I have met) are apt

to call Plato an "intellectual snob" and then dismiss him as one who has no business in our kind of democracy. I cannot agree at all with this point of view. Plato was an artist and therefore an aristocrat, a man to whom the best alone is good enough and who will accept no compromises in the matter of life's essentials. In an era when to most people the second best is good enough, Plato will suffer a temporary eclipse, but his hour will come again, though neither you nor I, my beloved friend, will be here to see it.

And now to far-away places and a land that is a complete mystery to most of us, myself very much included. I have never been to China, but that does not mean that I have never met any Chinese. Indeed, I have, and I have found the poorer ones admirable in their industry and their good-natured cheerfulness. I hear that when they go bad they do so in a great big way, but those I have known well were as a rule possessed of certain qualities of patience and application which put them shoulder-high above their white and brown and black neighbours, especially the white ones. As for the educated ones, they were so far beyond me in every respect that they made me feel ashamed of myself.

What I liked in the Chinese more than anything else were their truly Erasmian spirit of tolerance, their resemblance to Montaigne in his most delightful contemplative mood, and their wit (ribald or otherwise), which gave everything they said or wrote a pleasant Rabelaisian touch. And finally they had a very delicate feeling for the inner sense of things and were rarely guilty of those gaucheries which Western people so often confuse with honesty. My friends who were thoroughly familiar with China and the Chinese never cease to tell me that this picture is much too flattering. They inform me that the Chinese are also possessed of a high degree of low cunning, that they are apt to be grossly materialistic in their approach towards their daily existence, that they can be very cruel and entirely indifferent about the suffering of their fellow-men, and that their outward calm does not at all correspond to that inner peace of soul which we suspect behind their gaily smiling eyes.

All of which may be perfectly true. The Pacific paradise in which I had always believed from the circumstantial evidence left behind by the early travellers and some of the fugitives from our own civilization did not exactly come up to the sad truth I beheld with my own eyes when, a great many years later, I was able to visit that incredibly lovely part of our planet. But when I set foot on Tahiti and Hawaii and saw the hideous things civilization had done to these benighted natives, I forced myself to remember that for a century and a half these poor creatures had been exposed to the tender ministrations of the white whaler, the white trader,

and the Christian missionaries, not to mention the white sailors and marines of those European nations which have grabbed those islands as military outposts for their own predatory purposes. And therefore, as far as the Chinese are concerned, I shall, until I learn better, stick to my original opinion that the average Chinese (unless spoiled by his white and Christian environment) is touched by something—a philosophy of life rather than a religious system—which makes it possible for him to derive more satisfaction and contentment from his earthly existence than the members of those other races with whom I have spent most of my days on this planet.

Quite naturally, I then felt it necessary to answer the question: what exactly had made the Chinese what they were and are? Why did they click as they clicked, and what had they got which we Westerners had not got? The only way I could find out was by reading a great many books, and in every volume dealing with the Chinese enigma I sooner or later came across one man, a prophet, or a philosopher (he was called by all sorts of names), who was said to be chiefly responsible for having made the Chinese what they are and for having made them click the way they have been doing these last twenty-five hundred years.

His name was K'ung-fu-tse, but when Europe finally heard about him (a couple of thousand years after his death), his name was Latinized into Confucius, and as such he has been known ever since.

K'ung-fu-tse was born in the year 551 B.C. and he came of an old and distinguished family. It makes us Westerners look a bit silly! Are we really as young as all that? Five hundred years before the birth of Christ, my native land did not yet exist. Nebuchadnezzar had just disappeared from the shores of Babylon, and Jerusalem's first big Temple had been destroyed only a few years before. Solon had just died. The Acropolis still had to wait a century before it was to be crowned with the Parthenon. As for Rome, it was still a small country town struggling desperately to maintain itself against its rivals, the Etruscans, and four hundred more years were to go by before it could lay any claim to being called the centre of an empire.

We people of the West, therefore, were still savages who lived in mud huts and painted our faces sky-blue when the Chinese already had learned to eat from their beautiful porcelain dishes and to ornament the walls of their houses with pictures of such exquisite workmanship that they have never been surpassed by any modern artist and had already given the world of eastern Asia a prophet of such profound wisdom that he was able to provide several hundred million people with an understandable and workable philosophy of life which was to influence them in their

daily existence for the next twenty-five hundred years and which, at this moment, seems to be as vital as ever.

I am sorry that I can only give you second-hand information about this famous sage, for the Chinese language is a closed book to me, and I am now much too old to learn it.

At the age of twenty K'ung-fu-tse entered on his career as a Government official and was appointed manager of the gardens and public fields of the province which to-day is called Shantung. That means, incidentally, that the Chinese Government was already interested in a planned economy at a time when our own ancestors were still nomads and lived that hand-to-mouth existence which kept them for ever on the brink of starvation.

A regular career in the civil service does not seem to have appealed very greatly to young K'ung, and soon afterwards he resigned to become a school-teacher. He was twenty-two years old when he took that step. He had been married three years and had one son. This son begat other sons, and I am informed by my Chinese friends that the story of there still being direct descendants of the great sage is true. The K'ung family therefore has succeeded in maintaining itself in the direct line for some sixty generations, and that in itself is a considerable record, for we have not a single Italian family that goes back to the days of ancient Rome, and a western European family that can trace its genealogy back beyond the fifteenth century is as rare as a really warm day in England.

And so at the age of twenty-two we find our hero as head of a school of his own, but a very peculiar institute of learning, for it did not teach the usual curriculum but specialized in making its pupils conscious of the existence of good and evil and undertook to instruct them in how to acquire virtue and how to avoid vice. The only conditions of admission (that, too, was rather unusual from our modern point of view) were a serious desire for wisdom and an industrious application to one's studies. There were no fees. Those who came from rich homes were expected to pay for the upkeep of the poor scholars who brought nothing with them but the clothes on their backs and a wooden bowl from which to eat their frugal meals of rice.

The school attracted widespread attention. Two sons of one of the princely houses in the province of Lu were sent by their parents to sit at the feet of this strange young master. When their families suggested that their tutor accompany them on their grand tour (this smacks of the Europe of the eighteenth century), he accepted the offer and used this unexpected opportunity to perfect himself in the knowledge of the Chinese language and its music. According to legend, it was on this occasion

that he met the famous Lao-tse, a man considerably older than himself and the founder of Taoism.

What did Taoism mean in the time of Confucius? And what does it mean to-day? Again I must plead ignorance. As near as I can make out it was a philosophy of life which taught that true happiness could only be accomplished by scrupulously obeying the Law. And the Law, to Lao-tse, seems to have meant the collection of ancient ceremonials which had been handed down from father to son for the last five thousand years. In addition to this respect for the past, Taoism preached the greatest possible simplicity both in thought and action, and in this way it agreed with the conclusions of all the great sages of all times.

Confucius appears to have been deeply impressed by Lao-tse, who from his side does not seem to have been in the least interested in his visitor or to have felt the slightest sympathy for his troubles. Yet troubles he had, and a great many of them. During his absence from home there had been an outbreak of revolution in his native country, and it had led to the expulsion of the ruling dynasty. Confucius, the incarnation of law and order, could not possibly approve of such an act of violence, and when the legitimate prince was driven into exile, he and his disciples followed him voluntarily rather than accept the domination of a usurper.

From that time on K'ung-fu-tse led the existence of a wandering philosopher. Somewhere he felt there must be a wise and far-seeing leader who would want to avail himself of the services of a true man of learning. But such superior potentates have always been exceedingly scarce. The last example we had of the combination of a great administrator and a very wise human being occurred almost two centuries ago, when Frederick the Great came to the throne of Prussia. He actually did what Plato and Confucius had always hoped for. He sent for the most famous philosopher then alive and asked him to come and live at his court. But the experiment was far from successful and only led to a very painful break between Frederick and Voltaire. Since then Governments have availed themselves of experts on health and animal husbandry and forest preservation, but we have never heard of the Washington Government sending for William James or George Santayana, and I very much doubt whether the political leaders of the fifties and sixties of the last century were even aware of the existence of a certain Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Confucius therefore was never able to settle down anywhere for any length of time, except on few and very rare occasions. One of these came about when he was fifty-two years old. An enlightened prince sent for him and appointed him his Minister of Justice. So well did the sage

acquit himself of his task that the whole of the nation soon became aware of his presence. Then the inevitable happened. Those who formerly had prospered by the unsettled state of affairs (the racketeers and politicians, as we would call them to-day) were finding themselves out of their jobs, and they promptly combined against this over-honest reformer. Rather than fight this rabble, K'ung quietly withdrew and spent the last fifteen years of his life peacefully living in his native province, where he increased the number of his disciples until there were over three thousand of them. Some eighty of these, according to his own testimony, were men of more than outstanding ability and really understood what their teacher meant.

Confucius died at the age of seventy-three, two years after the battle of Salamis, which saved Europe from the invasion of the Persians. According to the disciples who were with him at the moment of his demise, he anticipated his end with great dignity and without any apprehension of a future in which, by the way, he had never believed, for as Confucianism never became a religion, it had no need of either heaven or hell to keep its followers in line. The old gentleman simply withdrew from life when he had grown tired of waiting for that invitation that never came. No great prince, so he was now forced to realize, would ever ask him to become his prime minister and give him his chance to show how a country should be ruled with intelligence and honesty. Just before he sank into his last sleep he composed one of those short and descriptive poems of which the Chinese have always been so extraordinarily fond. It has been preserved and reads almost the same as the quatrain I quoted at the end of my little story about Plato.

The great mountain must crumble,  
The strong beam must break,  
The wise man must wither away like a plant.

The author of Ecclesiastes also was interested in this subject, though he expressed it in a slightly different form. *Vanitas vanitatum—et omnia vanitas*, but the sense is about the same: "Vanity of vanities—all is vanity."

Webster sums Confucianism up as follows: "As a philosophical system it is the basis of much of Chinese ethics, education, statecraft, and religion. Filial piety, benevolence, justice, propriety, intelligence, and fidelity are cardinal virtues." A most exalted code of behaviour and one of which every sensible man must approve.

Christianity has also been actively preaching such a programme for some two thousand years, but these twenty centuries have been an era of violence and cruelty and wholesale murder and theft—of crusades which killed enemy and friend alike—of assault with machine-guns upon natives armed with bows and arrows and of pious padres blessing those horrible

feats of valour with an appeal to that Man of Sorrows who had preached the law, "Love ye one another."

Then what, as I already asked a moment ago, has the Chinese laundryman round the corner got that allows him to survive in circumstances that would kill any other human being in less than half a dozen years, that enables him to bear up with the sort of white people among whom he is obliged to live on account of his poverty, and yet makes it possible for him to turn his children into well-mannered and well-behaved little citizens, in sharp contrast to the offspring of his supposedly Christian neighbours? Yes, indeed, what has he got? Did old K'ung bestow upon this world some sort of philosophical compass by which every one of his disciples is able to steer his little leaky craft safely across any part of the map and in any kind of weather? Or had the Chinese character already been definitely 'set' long before Confucius was born, and had the sage merely crystallized parts of it for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen who were too busy with their daily affairs to be able to study the works of the ancient philosophers for themselves?

There we are back again at the problem of the chicken and the egg. Was the religion of the Dutch people of the sixteenth century the religion of Erasmus, or was Erasmus the expression of the religious feelings of the Dutch people of the sixteenth century? Did Descartes give the French of the seventeenth century a new approach to life, or was he himself the final product of those ideas which had already existed among them for hundreds of years? I don't know and I am very much afraid that I shall never find out. But I suspect that it was the personality of Confucius rather than his works (as revealed by the books of his disciples) which put its stamp upon the Chinese character.

The 'characteristic sayings' credited to Confucius are on a par with the short paragraphs one finds in many small-town newspapers and which have no other purpose than to fill up the editorial page on days when there is not any real news. Most of them are pretty commonplace, and few of them come up to the heritage of wisdom which Kin Hubbard, through his character Abe Martin, bestowed upon the readers of *The Indianapolis News*. Here are two examples taken at random from the literary remains of K'ung-fu-tse and Kin Hubbard.

Says the Chinese sage: "A poor man who does not indulge in flattery and a rich man who is not proud are praisable characters, but they are not equal to the poor who are always cheerful and the rich who yet love the rules of propriety." The philosopher from Indiana settles such problems by the remarks that while it's no disgrace to be poor, it might just as well be and: "Th' world gets better ever' day—then wuss agin in th' evening."

If I ever decide to follow the example of Montaigne and take out my

brush and paint inspiring texts all over my grandchildren's schoolroom, I am sure that I shall give them both Kin and Con. That would then make Confucius a sort of Chinese Abe Martin and Abe Martin an Indiana Chinese. And why not? For it is their 'homey' quality, in the best sense of the word, that accounts for their popularity with the masses of plain, ordinary people and for the fact that they succeeded in doing what the much more eloquent philosophers have invariably failed to do. Both of them were country folk, familiar with the people who lived on and of and by the good earth, and both of them were therefore natural philosophers, for no one who is on an intimate footing with nature, who watches the seasons and the tides, and who is dependent for his living upon sunshine and rain can help becoming a kind of village sage. Unless the local witch-doctors get him, in which case he is lost and becomes that most hateful of all of God's creatures, a small-town fanatic.

Now, not even the worst enemies of Confucius—those rulers who hated him so much that as soon as he had died they ordered all his books to be burned—have ever accused him of that. Bigotry and meddling officiousness were abhorrent to him. He was all for the policy of live and let-live. And he was so enthusiastic about the idea of let-live that he sat himself down in his humble but neat and harmonious little house, took out brush and ink box, and asked himself the question, "How and in what manner can I teach my people to go through life with a minimum of suffering and a maximum of contentment?"

Other philosophers and other faith-founders have done the same thing, but none of them have been quite as successful, because Confucius was the only one who had always one eye firmly fixed on that soil he knew so well from his own experience and out of which grew his ideas as well as his cabbages.

The accusation often made that the Confucian creed is lacking in spiritual qualities is undoubtedly true. Confucius was not over-spiritual. He did not deny that there might be a world hereafter, but he felt that the evidence in favour of such a heavenly home and a future life among the blessed was rather vague and depended entirely upon the hearsay of people who had never been there.

On the other hand, the world in which Confucius lived was very much of a tangible fact. Nobody could deny its existence, because it was there for all to see and hear and smell. People could even sit down on it and touch it and, if they were hungry enough (as often happened in China), they could eat it and in that way prolong life for a few more miserable days. As reasonable and intelligent human beings, so Confucius taught, it was up to the human race to make the best of its bad bargain, for with a little reason and intelligence a great many things could be accomplished.



It sometimes happened, so he taught, that during a journey one was obliged to spend a few days in a poverty-stricken village, waiting for a bridge to be repaired or for a train of pack-horses to come along and carry one's luggage. What would an intelligent and reasonable man do in those circumstances? He would examine the situation, take stock of his assets, and make his plans accordingly. He would not expect to find porter-house steak in a place where nobody was sufficiently rich to keep a cow. Then what was there to eat and how could a few bony chops be prepared in such a way as to make a tolerably good meal? There were no vegetables except turnips. Was there any method by which a turnip could be turned into a dish fit for human consumption? There was no tavern. But somewhere there might be a half-ruined temple which could be turned into quite a comfortable shelter for at least a few nights. And so on and so forth. One might even, by means of a diligent search, discover a few amusing or quaint characters among the villagers and pass a pleasant evening listening to their stories about wild animals that had haunted the neighbourhood or to their playing of the flute, for in such remote hamlets there often were old codgers who still remembered tunes long since disappeared from every other part of the land. And best of all, one could make friends or at least get oneself respected by the country-folk for the civility of one's manners, the elegance of one's address, and the courtesy of one's deportment.

Change this scene from a small village in the hinterland to a big city on one of the large rivers or the coast of a powerful province, and while the people with whom one would have to deal would be slightly different, the manner of one's dealing with them would be exactly the same, until it was possible to lay down a pretty concrete code of behaviour which would work everywhere and in all circumstances and which would make it possible for both the poorest of coolies and the richest of merchants or warriors to spend their short residence on this earth with that maximum of contentment and that minimum of pain after which every intelligent man would quite naturally strive.

Let me give you a few examples from this idea code which I have extracted out of the bale of books I have read upon the general subject of Confucius and Confucianism:

Politeness is the oil of the social machinery. Therefore, train yourself to be polite in all circumstances, even the most painful ones. All men, women, and children will do much more for you if you approach them with a smile than if you come to them with a frown. Therefore, be sure to smile, even if you have a tummy-ache and feel much more like cursing than showing evidences of a cheerful spirit.

The older members of the community are apt to dominate the social

and economic life of any city or village, because they have the money. Furthermore, unless they are complete fools, they are bound to have acquired a certain amount of practical wisdom during their long residence on this earth. Therefore, show the older people that you respect them. That will make them like you, and then in turn you will probably come to like them, and that will establish a good understanding—beneficial to both old and young.

A family will never get anywhere if it is a debating society in which little Lin will contradict his father and will tell his mother that she is talking nonsense. Therefore, encourage the children to be polite and courteous to their parents and let the parents treat their children with understanding and forbearance, for that will make life within the circle of the family harmonious, and it will turn the home into a place in which all of them like to dwell.

A stranger who has never met you before will judge you by your personal appearance. You may have a heart of gold, but that will not be noticeable at first sight, whereas last week's scrambled eggs on the lapel of your coat will be spotted immediately. Therefore, try to look neat. Your clothes may be threadbare and worn, but they can at least be well brushed.

You may, for a time at least, get away with a certain amount of dishonesty in dealing with your fellow-merchants. But in the end your neighbours will find you out, and then there is an end to your commercial career. Therefore, be honest in all your business dealings. If by nature you are inclined to indulge in a little sly crookedness, suppress that instinct, for honesty pays in the end, and you are out to make a living, aren't you?

Often the saint goes about disguised as a beggar. Therefore, be agreeable to beggars, for you may be entertaining a saint.

I might go on for several pages more, but this will give you an idea of my notions about Confucius and what he taught. I know that many of his popular sayings got petrified as time went on, for that seems to be the habit of all maxims. I have also been told that I am much too lenient in my judgment on the old gentleman. At heart, so I am told, he was a good deal of a conservative and even a reactionary who played beautifully into the hands of the ruling classes, who most heartily approved of his insistence upon that respect which all young men should show their elders and upon the subservient attitude with which all subjects should approach their masters. I am inclined to feel that that objection is well taken.

But the same holds good for our own religion. The Christ who is worshipped in St Peter's in Rome is a very different person from the Christ I once met in a poor Lapp church where the dogs lay round the altar

because no one had the heart to turn them out when the temperature outside stood at thirty below zero. It also goes for the perverted and degenerate kind of Buddhism which spread all over India and China five hundred years after the founder of that purest and noblest of all faiths had fulfilled his self-predicted fourscore years and had left this earth for parts unknown. I think it is even safe to say that it also holds true for a great deal of our science, especially our medical science, which in the hands of mediocre disciples is apt to become something very different from what it had been intended to be by the original discoverers of some great new method of bringing relief to their ailing fellow-men.

And it is a fact, sadly observed by all those who are in a position to do so, that music and painting also have a tendency to get so set in their mode of expression that they lose all direct contact with real life and have to be thrown on the ash heap.

For all these reasons I have just mentioned, and even in the face of a great deal of adverse criticism, I still remain a sincere admirer of old K'ung-fu-tse, for without any supernatural pretensions and with a minimum of hocus-pocus he was able to give hundreds of millions of people a practical and workable philosophy of life which has made it possible for them, without any hope of a subsequent reward, to do the best they could in the most terrible of circumstances, to keep cheerful under all kinds of inexcusable provocations, to remain industrious when there was no reason to exert themselves, and to keep smiling when they had every reason to weep.

Wherefore, when he comes to our house next Saturday, I shall accord Confucius the three ceremonial bows to which he is entitled by reason of his having been a State official of the first class with the green peacock feather. And I shall do my best to hide from him the sacrilege we have committed with his name. I always wonder what the Europeans in China would have said if some Chinese columnists had started being very funny about their Saviour. "Jesus Christ—he say . . ."

But then, that sort of bad taste is so entirely foreign to the nature of those who were brought up in the school of the best-mannered of all spiritual teachers that we cannot even contemplate the possibility of its ever having taken place. Or if it should occur, it probably would be the work of some bright boys or girls who had been given the benefits of a Western education.

Saturday came and with it a sudden uncomfortable feeling—how were we going to converse with our friend from beyond Lake Baikal? Plato would be easy enough, for though the Greek spoke no Latin, Erasmus knew enough Greek to be able to translate at least the most important

parts of our conversation if there were to be any kind of exchange of ideas—something we could never predict. But Confucius spoke the Lu dialect of the sixth century B.C. No use asking one of our many Dutch friends who knew Chinese to come and help us out that evening, for he probably would no more understand the old philosopher than a Chinese from the extreme north can make sense of what is being said by his cousin from the extreme south. Of course, there was always the possibility of drawing pictures, and I made sure that there would be a plentiful supply of paper and I took out the Chinese fountain-pen Dwight Franklin had once given me (a curious contraption—made out of a brush and a small piece of Chinese ink, kept moist by a little sponge) and I practised my strokes and I prayed for that inspiration without which a European trying his hand at Chinese art is bound to express himself almost as clumsily as an Oriental trying to paint in the Western fashion.

Saturday evening, half-past six. Everything is ready, and Frits and I are sitting in front of the fire, waiting for still another chapter to commence in that incredible experience which has now been ours for almost four months. At a quarter to seven Erasmus slips in, greets us, goes, as is his habit, into the kitchen to address a few kind words to the cook and her husband, and joins us for a small glass of Moselle, which he prefers to the gin which is the common Dutch drink just before dinner. We ask him whether he has brushed up his Plato, and he says yes—that is exactly what he has been doing these last five days.

“I’ve caught you at last!” I say. “You always pretend that you have no idea about whom we intend to invite.”

He laughs and answers. “Oh, well, one goes places and one sometimes hears things.”

As he has not been, as far as we know, out of his study in the town hall, we wonder what “places” he means, but we think that it is better not to touch upon this delicate subject. We want these dinners to continue and do not want to incur any disapproval for an act of unintentional indiscretion.

Three minutes to seven.

There is a knock at the door. Frits’ house still has the old-fashioned Dutch door divided into two parts—a practical arrangement, for in summer it allows you to have a draught in the house while preventing the children from running out into the street. Now the upper part of that door slowly opens, and there stands Confucius. It is easy to recognize him, for he looks exactly like his pictures. Then the lower part of the door too is opened as if by invisible hands, and Confucius enters. He does not offer to shake hands, but to each one of us he bows slowly—

once, twice, three times. We answer his salutation in the same way. By means of gestures we beg him to sit down, which he does.

Then we notice that he is being followed by a young Chinese in ordinary civilian clothes. He too bows three times to each of us and then explains why he is there. "I am a descendant of Confucius," he tells us. "I believe that I am his grandson in the forty-second degree, but," and with a sly smile, "we may, of course, have lost count, for it has been a very long time. I was a student at Cornell, in the agricultural department, when the Japanese invaded our country. I went back home and took service with our army. I'm afraid that I was not a very good soldier. I was lacking in caution. I got shot through the heart. It was a painless death. To-night my honoured ancestor suggested that I should accompany him to act as his interpreter. I do not always understand him—it takes a little patience. You know how difficult it would be for you to talk with Chaucer, and he lived only a few hundred years ago. But we are of the same blood and"—another smile—"we get along very nicely."

He now talks rapidly in Chinese. He seems to repeat the last part of his sentence, for the old gentleman looks at him in an affectionate way and pats his back in that unaffected manner which is neither Oriental nor Occidental but just universally human. We tell our unexpected guest how very welcome he is. Then we ask him to repeat this message to his distinguished kinsman.

I notice that a change has come over us. Quite unconsciously we sober-minded and exceedingly unceremonious Dutchmen have suddenly dropped our rather free and easy manners and are proceeding with measured tread in everything we say and do. Frits too has observed this and gives me a knowing wink. Then Jo comes in with the plates for the first course, and a miracle happens.

The average Dutchman or Dutch woman could not possibly be hired to curtsy to anyone, and with all the respect they feel towards their Queen, they prefer not to go to court rather than make themselves ridiculous by going through certain ceremonials they somehow associate with setting-up exercises. But without being told what to do, our cook curtsies deeply before our unusual guest. When I ask her afterwards where she has learned it, she answers me, "Of course I never learned it, but it seemed the right thing to do."

Then we notice that Plato has arrived. He looks exactly like his bust in the Vatican, at Rome. He has a heavy black beard, slightly touched up with oil, and his hair drops down over his high forehead. He has a strong nose and a much more sensitive mouth than we had expected.

Him Erasmus welcomes with a few polite phrases in his best university

Greek. At first Plato looks puzzled. Then he catches on and repeats to himself what Erasmus has just said. We notice that it sounds very different from the Greek we had learned at school.

As for the two guests of honour, they too now exchange a few complimentary phrases. This takes time, for they have to make use of two interpreters. Then from the upper floor there come the soft notes of a Mozart andante for the flute, and both Plato and Confucius listen with evident delight. When the air has come to an end, they indicate by gestures that they would like to hear some more of the same sort, and I call up to Hein to play Mozart's Quartet for Flute and Strings. Then the moment has come to go to dinner. An extra plate has been set for Confucius' grandson, forty-two times removed, and dinner is served.

The meal, I am glad to say, seems to be entirely satisfactory to our guests, and Plato finds special pleasure in the size of our California olives, which, he tells Erasmus, are almost twice as large as they used to be in his own time, "when," as he adds, "the gods provided us with our meals, for whenever one of my students got hungry, he plucked himself a few fruits from the trees underneath which I used to teach, and we were not forced to interrupt our discussions."

I tell him that is hardly the way we do our teaching nowadays. "Why not?" asks Plato, via Erasmus. "Are not your students interested?"

"Yes," I answer, "but in a different way."

"Is there a different way?" Plato continues his inquiry.

But I prefer to change the conversation. It might lead up to rather painful confessions about the attitude our modern students take towards all problems of learning not immediately connected with the practical purpose of making a living. Jo saves the situation. She has improvised some kind of dessert, and that too is received favourably. Fortunately, Frits has had the bright idea of ordering after-dinner tea instead of coffee. Jo serves it in our best old blue Delft cups, and Confucius notices them, examines them carefully, and tells us that they compare very favourably with some cups he used to have when he lived with the Marquis of Ts'i. Then he adds as a sort of after-thought, "That was in the days when I was still full of hope that I might at last find one ruler willing to give me a chance to put my ideas into actual practice, my ideas about government based directly upon the principles of righteousness and virtue. But the invitation never came. Circumstances were too strong for me. I had only one chance. But the prince soon grew tired, and I was obliged to withdraw."

After our meal, as the night was rather cool, we withdrew to the comforts of the open fire. Erasmus sat in his favourite chair, in which some day we feared he would be roasted alive. Next to him sat Confucius,

and next to Confucius, Plato. Frits and I had the other two seats. The grandson placed himself discreetly behind his progenitor. He was full of consideration for the old gentleman, and his translating was done so rapidly and so unobtrusively that it was like talking to our beloved Helen Keller. The unknown tongue seemed to flow quietly into its linguistic equivalent. There was a true 'meeting of the souls'—for verily those people were tuned in on the same intellectual wave-length.

During the next three hours I consumed more tea than I had ever thought any human being could do in so short a time. Jo had put our largest kettle on the fire and kept it boiling, and tea has the same characteristic as the loaves and fishes of the miracle. It can perpetuate itself *ad infinitum*. All you need is a little hot water.

And now I come to the hardest part of the evening. I mean the hardest part for me, who am obliged to give an account of what we talked about. At first the conversation was kept on a pretty general basis, but soon it took a more definite turn. For there was one subject that seemed to be uppermost in the minds of these two men who, each in his own way, had given the subject of government as much attention as any other human beings who ever lived.

That was the question of how to put government into the hands of those best equipped for this difficult task.

They were, of course, thoroughly familiar with every scheme that had ever been devised to safeguard a nation against tyranny from either above or below. Democracy, totalitarianism, authoritarianism, dictatorship, out-and-out tyranny, and despotism, representative forms of government, experiments with socialism—all these proved to be problems not merely of our own day and age, but as old as the human race itself. Confucius would give us examples that went back more than twenty-five centuries. Plato would answer with some of his own experiences during the fifth century before the beginning of the Christian era. Erasmus would talk of the difficulties his beloved student, the great Emperor Charles, had encountered four hundred years before. Frits and I would modestly bring up some of the perplexing puzzles of our own time. But to tell you the truth, we got nowhere at all. Invariably we returned to the question, "How can we possibly prevent a single man or a minority from forcing its will upon the majority? And how can we be sure that those best fitted to rule will do the actual ruling?"

Finally, towards the end of the evening, we seemed to be reaching a conclusion. Both Confucius and Plato agreed that a reasonable form of government, equally satisfactory to all people, would never be possible until, first of all, the whole of mankind should have been taught to accept

a 'moral basis' for its behaviour, not merely as private citizens, but also as members of the community.

And how could this be brought about?

This could only be done by substituting a love for the good of the community at large for the old attitude that man was primarily a predatory animal, for ever in search of his own gain and ready to trample down whosoever came in his way while he was in search of food and lodging and a few extra luxuries (as many as possible) for his own family.

There was no disagreement upon this subject. None at all. But the moment we had reached this conclusion, there we were once more face to face with that perplexing question, "Was there such a moral basis, and if there was, how could a sufficient number of people be persuaded to accept it and to fight for its maintenance with their lives?"

Religion? It had been tried and found wanting.

Education? We had educated and educated and educated, and how much good had it done? It had disseminated a lot of heterogeneous and quite useless information, but it had not noticeably added to the wisdom of the populace.

And so we went on until the hour of departure came.

But this time there was no sudden lowering of the lights, no sudden darkness, no sudden disappearance. Confucius seemed to anticipate that soon the moment would come for us to bid each other good-bye. Some ten minutes before the clock was to strike the hour of midnight, he got up and through his grandson (who had proved to be a most delightful and charming companion) he assured us that it was many centuries since he had enjoyed so delightful an evening. Plato did likewise, though in less flowery language, and even Erasmus was moved to confess that the evening had been almost as pleasant as a night spent at the home of his beloved Thomas More.

Then there were ceremonial bows between all of us. Then the clock struck. Then the candles went out, and Frits and I were left behind with some more delightful memories.

We finished our final cup of tea and looked at each other. "Well," Frits said, "the problem still seems as far removed from a final and successful solution as ever before. What shall we do?"

"Work," I answered. "Work until we find a way out, for otherwise . . ."

"Yes, otherwise?"

"Otherwise there soon won't be any human race left to worry about."

In the kitchen Jo and Hein had turned on the radio. The sound reminded us of the B.B.C. announcement in the six o'clock news earlier in the evening that Adolf Hitler might in the near future become the undisputed leader of the German people.



Both Frits and I shuddered as we now discussed it.

“Good God!” he said, tossing his last cigarette into the fire. “What next?”

I had no answer to give. There was no answer. There was only dumb despair.

“This may be the solution,” Frits said, to break the terrible silence.

“Yes,” I answered him. “The solution of chaos and death.”

PETER THE GREAT and CHARLES XII OF SWEDEN Are  
Invited, and VOLTAIRE Comes Anyway, but Is,  
of Course, a Most Welcome Guest

WOULD we ever have another evening like the last one? We doubted it. Not that anything very special had been said or that we had solved a single one of the world's great problems. We had come out by the same door as in we went. Yet we had learned one very important lesson. We had been made to realize that as long as there would be men like the two we had met the night before, willing to give the whole of their lives and all of their brilliant minds towards an effort to make this planet fit for human habitation—we need not worry, for then it was merely a question of time and patience for the secret to reveal itself.

It might take a thousand years or ten thousand years, but that was of no concern to nature, with all eternity at its disposal. It was our own incessant quest for the Holy Grail that mattered. The rest was 'detail' as the French would have it. We had now come in close personal contact with two of the noblest knights who had led the search for a reasonable solution and we had been deeply impressed. It was not easy to think of other guests who could possibly come up to the standard that had been set on that ever-memorable evening when we played hosts to Plato and Confucius.

Frits confessed himself to be at a complete loss, and I too had no idea where to turn for even the vaguest kind of suggestion. I had just acquired the famous Blaeu Atlas, printed in Amsterdam during the middle of the seventeenth century and a joy for ever to anyone with a love for fine craftsmanship. The volume containing Europe was on my desk, and, opening it at random, I found myself gazing at a page showing the Baltic.

I had always had a great affection for the countries of northern Europe. I love the landscape of my native land, but I find myself much more at home among the people of Scandinavia. And before I die I hope to spend one more winter in Norway, one more spring in Denmark, one more summer in Stockholm, and one more autumn in Lapland, with a side trip to Finland if there still is a Finland after Russia has once more failed to find an outlet in the south and must content itself with one of the ice-free harbours of the north.

Maps are more apt to give me ideas than any other kind of intellectual stimulants—pictures, letters, or contemporary documents.

"Wait a moment, Frits," I said. "I think that I've got something."

"I hope that it's something good."

"I rather think so. Suppose we ask Charles of Sweden and Peter of Russia. There you have a conflict between two entirely different civilizations. And it is beautifully dramatized by these two strong personalities. Last week we dealt with politics in the abstract. Suppose that next week we have a taste of concrete politics. The contrast should be interesting, to say the least. Provided these two hotheads do not decide to fight it out in your dining-room. I once tried on a coat that had belonged to Peter the Great. I looked like one of my grandchildren putting on Grandpa's hat. I was lost in it, though I am well over six feet two.

"Charles, on the other hand, was a little fellow. I have seen his buff and yellow uniform in Stockholm. Not much over five feet three, I would say, but he was one of the bravest and most relentless fighters of the whole of the eighteenth century, which rather specialized in that type of fire-eater and swordsman, and I hate to think of what would happen to your lovely china if the two crazy fellows choose your room for a final battle."

"Anyway, they could not behave as badly as the holy boys from Nicæa, no matter how hard they tried," Frits answered, "so go ahead and ask them."

Charles of Sweden was born in 1682. Peter of Russia was ten years older. They therefore had been contemporaries, and that made it easy for us to feed them. Not that either of them would have cared much what they were given. Peter was born a barbarian and remained so until the end of his days, eating like one of his own peasants, a habit which caused great perplexities to the rulers of the West when they were obliged to entertain this imperial savage during those journeys he undertook to obtain first-hand information about the civilization of Europe. As for Charles, he had been a monomaniac, so completely dominated by his desire to destroy the growing power of Russia that nothing interested him except his army, his soldiers, his navy, everything connected with his eastern campaign and his Swedish empire. As far as we know, no woman ever played any kind of rôle in his life. He had a large number of almost pathetically loyal followers but not a single friend, for there was not a man whose life he would not gladly sacrifice if by so doing he could score another victory over the hated Muscovite or the equally detested King of Poland. He merely ate to keep alive, without ever noticing what he put into his mouth, for the business of dining was apt to keep him away (for a few moments, at least) from his maps and his plans, and therefore he could not bother about it.

Charles could not even give himself time enough to get well after he had been wounded in battle, and as he was always in the midst of the fray, he stopped many a bullet during his nineteen years in the field. That is a long time to spend in the open, sleeping in tents or smoky peasant huts, but that is his record, and a very remarkable one it is, for Hannibal (who is his runner-up) returned home after only fifteen years in Italy, while Napoleon, although he was for ever at war with somebody during the twenty-two years of his active career, believed in short campaigns and hastened back to Paris as soon as he had defeated whoever had been on his list.

Our guests therefore would not be very particular about the food we placed before them, but we intended to do as well by them as we could, for both of them were unpredictable characters, accustomed to have everything their own way. That particular evening, of all the evenings of their lives, might prove to be the one they had expected to devote to the pleasures of the table, and heaven help us if then we should have been found wanting! They had been brought up in an atmosphere of 'yes-men' and they would let us know in unmistakable terms what they thought about our hospitality.

And so here was the menu upon which, by the way, we could spend all the money appropriated for this party, for we would not be under any necessity to buy new records. Neither of our guests, as far as we knew, had ever shown the slightest interest in music. Perhaps they had liked to listen occasionally to a little military music, but military bands, as we know them to-day, did not come into existence until the Napoleonic wars, and I would not have known where to get records of eighteenth-century bands that would have sounded like the bugle corps which had accompanied the armies of Peter and Charles. Peter, of course, must have been familiar with Russian church music, but he had never shown the slightest interest in that aspect of the services, which was entirely too cultural for his primitive tastes.

I decided not to waste any money on new records, but instead, I ordered something that is both rare and expensive in the Low Countries—a venison steak. We could get one by telegraphing to Amsterdam, and I asked Jo to follow our old recipe for *Rouelles de cerf à la Saint-Hubert*, which has the venison boiled in bouillon and red wine with a liberal admixture of prunes and laurel leaves, giving it a decided taste of *Hasenpfeffer*.

With this I asked our good cook to serve a purée of potatoes mixed with string beans, and I thought that brown beans with a heavy gravy would turn this into a stout masculine meal. I decided to dispense with the *smörgåsbord* as it is served to-day, realizing that, although usually associated with the kitchen of Sweden, it is a comparatively recent

innovation. Instead of the familiar *smörgäsbord*, we would have a small wooden keg of fresh Dutch herring and several cans of sardines and anchovies to be eaten with that heavy Dutch peasant bread which has changed but little from the days of the seventeenth century—and lots and lots of unsalted butter.

As for soup, well, there we might see what Peter thought of the modern version of borsch. I am not particularly fond of cabbage and beet soup, which I feel should be served with a chaser of bicarbonate of soda. So, using Erasmus' weak stomach as an excuse, I asked Jo to give him and me a plate of simple Dutch vegetable soup, but to make up for this bit of cheating, I told her to serve the men their borsch with slices of Bologna to take the place of croutons. I thought that this Bologna would appeal to our two simple guests, especially if we could get the original Italian variety with a lot of garlic in it.

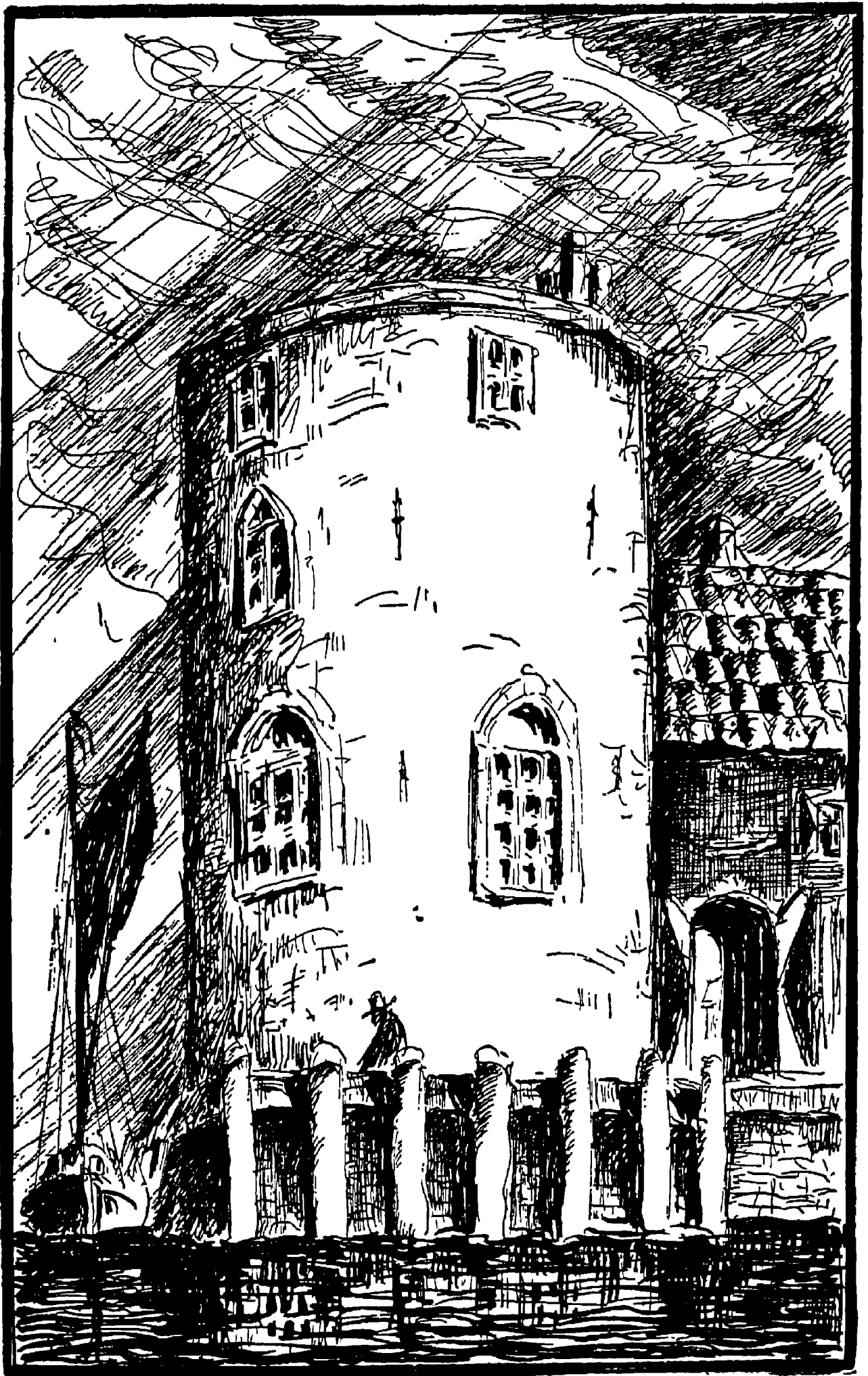
All that would seem like quite a meal to a modern person, but realizing that we would have to deal with the hearty if uncultivated appetites of man-hunters, I also ordered a course of cold lobster with mayonnaise to be served immediately after the venison. Neither Peter nor Charles would ever have tasted mayonnaise, for it had been invented by the Duc de Richelieu, who flourished after their time and who had called this famous sauce after the victory the French fleet had won at Port Mahon, in Minorca, while he happened to be secretary of the navy to King Louis XV.

Then for dessert, *beignets à la mariée*—apple dumplings with a sauce of orange blossoms—which was a highly cherished dish at the court of France during the latter half of the eighteenth century and which recurs repeatedly in Menon's volume on the suppers of the French monarchs, published in the year 1755.

Wine? Oh, any wine would do for these two old campaigners, as Frits observed, but there should be several bottles of vodka and aquavit, for when Russians and Swedes get together, they can absorb incredible quantities of these deadly distillations without showing the slightest signs of intoxication.

Coffee? Yes! And, of course, a bottle of Liebfraumilch for Erasmus and me. Frits could hold his own with any kind of alcohol and could join the guests when they tackled their native beverages and could probably outdrink them with ease and elegance.

All those details having been settled, I could now give Frits a short statement about these two extraordinary historical figures who had spent all their days continuing a quarrel which had begun almost a thousand years before their own time and which even to-day has by no means been settled.



ONE TOWER STILL GUARDED THE ENTRANCE TO OUR HARBOUR

To understand what I mean, please take out your atlas and look at the map of north-eastern Europe. An immense plain reaches from the Arctic Ocean down to the Black Sea. It is crossed by many rivers which have their origin in the low hills in the centre of the plain, and which flow either towards the north or towards the south. In the north-west this plain is bordered by the lake and forest region of what is now called Finland, and west of Finland lies the Scandinavian peninsula, which would be as cold and inhospitable as Labrador except for America's greatest gift to Europe—the Gulf Stream. The warm waters of the Gulf Stream keep the harbours of Scandinavia open for the greater part of the year, but the vast eastern plain has no outlets to the sea that are not covered with ice for six months of the year.

All this enormous tract of land had lain covered underneath a heavy blanket of snow and ice during the last of the great glacial periods. Finally the ice had withdrawn towards the North Pole and the land had gradually become fit for human habitation. Germanic tribes had crossed it and recrossed it until finally they had settled down permanently in western Europe and in Scandinavia. The Finns, a Tartar tribe distantly related to the Hungarians, had somehow found their way into what is now Finland, and the Slavs had at last taken possession of that great eastern plain between the Urals and the mountains of central Europe which to-day is known as Russia. The Slavs therefore were doomed to remain a landlocked people, a nation of "earth animals," as they were so aptly called by one of our contemporary historians. Not that this mattered as long as they were nomads. And even after they had settled down as farmers, they were still so badly organized and so insignificant in numbers and so backward in civilization that they never felt the need of any direct route of communication with the rest of the world.

But in the ninth century the Russians began to suffer from attacks on the part of their western neighbours. Then at last they felt the need of establishing some kind of order out of the chaos which for so many centuries had prevailed within their domains.

They no longer were heathens. Christian missionaries, hailing from Constantinople and following the rivers which crossed their plains, had taught them a few of the rudiments of civilization. Here and there an energetic tribal chief had established himself as a petty prince. All these princes, however, and all these princelets were for ever fighting among each other, and the result was disastrous to the peasants who still dwelled in a state of almost prehistoric poverty and misery.

It was then that the Russians sent word to the hardy men of the West who, as vikings, were beginning to overrun the whole of western Europe,

and told them, "There are millions of us, but we do not know how to govern ourselves. Please come and do the job for us."

The Norsemen did not have to be told twice. Here was an unlimited chance of easy plunder. They hastened eastward and founded a regular Russian state and as the Ruriki—descendants of a mythical Rurik, a Swedish chieftain who was said to have been the first to arrive on the scene—they administered Russia for almost seven hundred years. Then they died out (seven centuries is a long time for any dynasty to survive), and their place was taken by new rulers of undiluted Slavic origin. Perhaps there was a small admixture of Tartar blood in their veins from those days in the thirteenth century when Russia had been overrun and conquered by the little yellow men from the great plains that lay hidden behind the Ural mountains. But they felt themselves to be Russians and only Russians. The landlocked possessions of the grand dukes of Muscovy were no longer sufficient for their far-reaching ambitions. They must have outlets to the sea. In the north there was the eternal ice. In the south there were the Turks. There was only one exit left, by way of the Baltic. And here we connect with Piotr Aleksyeevich, better known to us as Peter the Great.

As his name indicates, Peter was the son of Tsar Alexius Mikhailovich, and therefore a member of the House of Romanov, which had got hold of the Muscovite throne in the year 1613. Alexius Mikhailovich had been married twice. Peter was the son of his second wife, Natalia Naryshkina. There was already a boy in the family, Ivan, but he was such a hopeless imbecile (and was, furthermore, suffering from an eye disease which had made him half blind) that even in the unsqueamish Russia of those days it was felt that he must never be allowed to exercise any kind of authority.

The elders of the state came together and appointed Peter to take his place. This led to an insurrection on the part of some of the troops who hoped to benefit by having an idiot on the throne. There was a compromise, and Ivan and Peter were recognized together.

As the boys were supposed to be too young to take a direct share in the government, their sister Sophia (in the case of Peter only a half-sister) was told to act as regent until her brothers should have reached their majority. This Sophia was a woman of considerable native ability, but she was very, very Russian in spirit, and the Russians of the seventeenth century were still living in a state of medieval ignorance, filth, and bliss. That would not have mattered so much if Moscow had still been a small Slavic nation. But after the fall of Constantinople, whatever was left of the cultural traditions of Byzantium, of the old Eastern Roman Empire, had been transferred to Moscow, and Moscow had thereupon become the centre of a civilization that did not have its counterpart in any other



part of the world. For it was an Asiatic despotism, very thinly disguised as a Christian state. The rigid etiquette of the old Byzantine emperors had been moved from the imperial palace of Constantinople to the Kremlin, but for the rest, very little had changed. The peasants in the villages continued to cultivate their lands on a co-operative and communistic basis, holding all the fields in common, just as the Puritans did when they first settled along the coast of the western Atlantic.

This fact has usually been overlooked by the people who have written about the Russia of the last twenty-five years. The Bolsheviks did not really do anything new. They merely returned to the days before Peter, when the Russians had been allowed to be Russians and had not been forced to behave like imitation Frenchmen, Germans, or Englishmen. To the people of the West, they seemed to be making a nose-dive into the future, whereas they were really jumping backward to the days of their earliest youth as a nation, and that probably accounts for the success of their experiments. The Bolsheviks therefore continued where Peter had left off.

Here is something else we should remember when we contemplate the almost meteoric rise to power of Tsar Peter. He did not have to start from scratch. The Muscovite grand duchy he inherited was already a very considerable empire.

In the year 1480 Ivan III had got rid of the last of the Tartar invaders. Two generations later, another Ivan had conquered Kazan and Astrakhan, and soon afterwards Russia had begun its conquest of Siberia. This Herculean task had been performed at such a rate of speed that already by the middle of the seventeenth century the coast of the Pacific had been reached and Russia was beginning to look for additional territory in the New World.

Peter therefore, when he reached the throne, was the ruler of a crude and primitive state but one that could be used as the nucleus for a modern nation, as 'modernity' was understood in the seventeenth century. For one thing, there were enough subjects to produce the enormous sums of money necessary for the creation of an army and a navy able to compete with the other European Powers. And there were enough young serfs (a much nicer word than slaves, but meaning almost the same thing) to keep both the army and the navy at par. All that was needed was a man of boundless energy and unhampered by any considerations of conscience to do the necessary organizing and to prepare Russia for the rôle of a dominant factor in European politics.

Let me now try and show you how I see this wild man who caned his own son to death but who lost his life trying to save that of one of his common soldiers. I have followed his career all over Europe and even

through part of Russia. That is the only way you ever learn anything about history. Here, for example, is a discovery I give you for what it is worth. In spite of all we have been told to the contrary, Lenin and Stalin and all their disciples and assistants should not really be considered big bad Communists. They were, and are, merely so many Peters the Great dressed up in modern civilian clothes and with cloth caps instead of tri-cornered hats. They were, and are, left-wing tsars, and the people they rule over are not really modern Communists. They are exactly the same sorts of peasants and serfs as those who lived in the seventeenth century when all this began. The only difference is that to-day they work in factories instead of sweating behind the plough.

Here is young Peter as I see him. Had he lived to-day, he would have been the joy of our psychologists—an ideal case for the study of every sort of maladjustment. He had been a neglected child and during his early youth had lived in constant fear of his life. The Kremlin in which he was brought up resembled a Turkish seraglio rather than a respectable Christian palace. But from his mother he seems to have inherited a certain tendency towards 'modernism.' Although this lady had spent all her married life in the seclusion of a concubineless harem (the old Russians were strictly monogamous as far as their official wives were concerned), she had as a young girl obtained a little first-hand information about the outside world and she must have contaminated her small son with some of her own enthusiasms for the ways of the West. Otherwise it seems incomprehensible that a young Muscovite prince, brought up in a completely Byzantine atmosphere, should ever have become at least a 50 per cent. European. For the only other person with whom Peter came in direct daily contact during his life in the Kremlin was his half-sister Sophia, and she was more than willing to remain as Russian as she always had been, not as much by inclination perhaps as by good sound policy, for she was on top and intended to stay there.

Meanwhile, she had no objections if Peter in his spare time amused himself as best he liked, provided he kept away from all councils of state and did not in any way interfere with the way she and her advisers saw fit to rule the land.

To Peter this was a most satisfactory arrangement. Since he had no regular duties at the court, he could spend all his days wherever he felt most at home. That happened to be that part of Moscow reserved for the foreign element which had gradually found its way to the Russian capital. Like all such foreign settlements, whether in Moscow or Madras, it was filled with a weird and unsavoury assortment of human beings. Carl Zuckmayer, who gave us *The Captain of Köpenick* and *The Laughing Vineyard*, should write a play about them. Think of all the strange

characters he could mix up into such an hilarious comedy about the scoundrels and swindlers of Moscow's Suburb of the Foreigners. Swiss watchmakers (who had absconded with their masters' funds), German apothecaries (who at home had done a little private poisoning), hard-drinking Dutch mechanics (specializing in ships wherever there was any demand for them and otherwise constructing windmills and water-mills), French doctors of doubtful scientific antecedents, Hungarian tailors (who had cut a little too much of a figure in the Budapest underworld), Parisian coiffeurs who would guarantee their fat Russian customers (one was not much of a lady, in that happy land, under two hundred pounds) the exact 'arrangement of the hair' as it was worn by the beautiful Marquise de La Pompe à l'Eau the last time she had attended the opera in Versailles.

In addition, dour representatives of those English trading companies which for a great many years had been established at Archangel, on the White Sea, pastry-cooks from Brussels, Danish fencing teachers, Amsterdam tobacco-dealers (for although the Russian Church had condemned smoking as one of the cardinal sins, the habit was taking hold), Turks with no visible means of support but who knew, in case a young man was interested, where to find him exactly the type of girl for whom he happened to be looking, French ladies' maids with highfalutin names (which they had adopted from their former mistresses) who were engaged in the same kind of business as the Turks, Prussian drill-masters who taught gymnastics, cashiered Austrian officers undertaking to teach the finer points of horsemanship to anyone with a horse and a solvent father, and Ethiopian princes selling the elixir of life according to the recipe which King Solomon had presented to the Queen of Sheba.

In addition (as the Society columns have it), the inevitable French dressmakers (of both genders) and maybe a couple of very discreet members of the Society of Jesus, nosing around in their own unobtrusive way to discover whether here and there—perhaps—they could not catch one of those heathen souls and save it for their own faith. And, furthermore, a number of Levantines who managed to exist the way only Levantines know how to exist, and citizens from far-away Cathay, whose tea caravans used to cross the deserts of Asia and who were now trying very hard to make the Muscovites tea-conscious, a task in which they succeeded beyond all expectations.

Also blackamoors from distant Africa who catered to certain not so nice interests among the older gentlemen of the local aristocracy. I even once read of an American Indian who had found his way to the Suburb of the Foreigners, but what he did there or why he had left his own happy hunting-grounds I never was able to find out. John Paul Jones was to be the first *bona fide* representative of the New World the Russians were to

see, but he did not come until much later. And the adventures which befell the great admiral show the sort of life these expatriated citizens lived, once they had ventured forth into the land of the Slavs. If (as we know from Jones' letters) existence was pretty bad and messy in the St. Petersburg of the eighteenth century, what must it have been in the Moscow of the seventeenth?

Yet that was the school which Piotr Aleksyeevich attended and where he got both his A.B. and his Ph.D., and that is where he learned to drink his gin and smoke his pipe. The first was no great sin in the eyes of the good Russians. According to legend, they had only decided in favour of Christianity over the much more practical Mohammedanism because the Prophet had been such a very strict advocate of teetotalism. But tobacco was anathema in the eyes of the Muscovite clerics. A pipe in a man's mouth filled their souls with almost as much horror as the sight of a beardless male face, for the Devil was clean-shaven whereas honest Christians wore beards that reached down to their knees. If this young prince was going to show himself in public "sucking tobacco," as smoking was then called, he might, should he ever come into full control of the Government, go as far as to advocate a beardless Russia.

Little did they know what awaited them! The pipe-smoking prince did come to the throne, and immediately afterwards his soldiers went through the streets of the capital and stopped every bearded boyar who came along. A quick twist of their sharp scissors—and the whiskers were gone. No use complaining, for if you were a little too loud in your protestations it might be your head that went next.

Peter's accession to the throne, as I told you a moment ago, had been accompanied by a mutiny of the lifeguards, and this mutiny had been suppressed in the approved Russian fashion—the rebellious soldiers had been slaughtered like cattle. Then there had been seven years during which Sophia had been the head of the State and during which Piotr of the Russian Kremlin was changed into Peter of the European Suburb. But these seven years had been no waste of time. On his country estate (Sophia liked it just as well if her brother kept out of her sight) Peter was busy drilling the sons of his serfs and on a small lake he was 'playing

nunnery and was never again seen in the Kremlin. Half-witted half-brother Ivan was not murdered but allowed to live on in semi-imbecility and complete retirement. And, aided and abetted by a professional soldier from Switzerland, a clever adventurer by the name of François Lefort, Peter was off on his self-appointed task of changing barbaric Russia into a supposedly civilized Western nation.

The young Tsar started upon his new career by turning his reorganized army against the Turks in the south. He was soon forced to the conclusion that he was still too weak to handle the infidel alone and that he would need allies in his crusade against the unbelievers. Why not try and persuade the rest of Europe to make common cause with their Russian brethren and start on a new crusade?

Unfortunately, Europe at that moment was much more worried about the ambitions of King Louis XIV of France than about those of the great sultan in nebulous and far-away Istanbul. All the same, Peter felt that he ought to make the attempt, and so for the first time in history the capitals of western Europe had a chance to gape at a large number of actual Russians—real Russian nobles with diamonds in their ears and lice in their hair—sweating away underneath their uncomfortable burdens of mink and ermine and making the people of the West wonder what kind of country this might be which was inhabited by such hopeless savages.

But they often failed to notice a gentleman in a simple captain's uniform who cut hardly any figure at all among the other members of the mission in their rich furs and with diamonds in their ears. Had they been sufficiently observant, they might have noticed that it was he who poked his nose into every factory and into every shipyard and print shop and who on the quiet offered nice fat contracts to engineers and architects and munitions makers and shipwrights and surveyors and physicians and apothecaries and carpenters, promising them all excellent wages if for a number of years they were willing to leave their native land and move to distant Moscow and help him reorganize and modernize his country. For this simple captain was no one less than the great Tsar himself, and what he had seen during his journey across Europe had made him more determined than ever to start upon the job of rejuvenating Russia—and to start doing it right away.

Yes, he also talked a good deal about a crusade against the Turks, but no Europeans were interested in something so far removed from their own interests. And so, from a political angle, the trip to western Europe was a sad failure. But when Peter returned to Russia he brought not less than five hundred Western experts with him, and while their number was ridiculously small in view of the task that awaited them, it was at least a beginning.

By the way, Peter returned much sooner than he had expected. He had to. The conservatives at home had seen the way the wind was blowing. Soon, they feared, the storm would become a regular hurricane, and once more there had been a mutiny on the part of the old palace guards, Peter, being informed of this new outbreak of rebellion, rode back to Moscow at breakneck speed, and the moment he had arrived in his capital there was another purge.

This time Peter did his job thoroughly. He himself assisted with the executions of his former soldiers. Only a few of the *streltsy* were left. And after their bodies had been thrown into the river, the work of reform began in all seriousness.

With his own hands Peter clipped the beards of his courtiers. Those who lamented too loudly were given an opportunity to retain their whiskers by paying a heavy ransom—so many thousands of roubles for every inch of hair. Then off with their long Oriental robes, while Hungarian tailors were busy making them their first suits of European clothes, consisting of practical short coats and pantaloons after the best Viennese patterns. And—a terrible shock to all believing Christians—from that time on, the year was supposed to begin on January first, as it did in the rest of the world, and not on September first, when, according to Russian chronology, God had created our planet.

All this sounds rather silly to us, but let us remember that, only a short time before, these same benighted Russians had destroyed a clock which had been erected in the Kremlin because the bell which struck the hours made them think of the voice of the devil. Also, they had burned down the first print shop in Moscow because books were suspected of being the cause of the spread of dangerous thoughts.

After these preliminary arrangements came the great struggle for a foothold in the north. Without the assistance of Europe, Russia was too weak to tackle the Turks, who held all the southern part of the great European plain. There was only one other way of escape, by means of the Baltic. That was the beginning of the twenty-year struggle with Sweden, the country which then, as now, held the key to the Baltic.

The first battle, that of Narva, ended in an ignominious defeat for the Russians, but Peter, who was just as obstinate as Charles, held on. He quickly reorganized his troops, ruined himself buying the latest cannon that were to be found on the European market, and in the battle of Poltava he annihilated the Swedes.

It was during the next twenty years, when at any moment the Russians might lose all they had thus far gained, that the new Russia came into existence. For now Peter realized that there was no other choice but to

go ahead. He must either succeed or perish, and so, as a starter, the grand duchy of Moscow became the Russian Empire.

Once more the title of tsar was made to mean what it had meant in the days of the original tsars, or Cæsars. The cumbersome and antiquated system of government of the old Moscow was abolished, and the road to advancement was placed wide open to talent plus loyalty. The names of the old noble families gradually disappeared from the lists of Government functionaries, and the names of new and totally unknown youngsters took their places. It no longer mattered who or what one's father had been. The sons of the commoners and even of liberated serfs could easily mount to the top of the official ladder and sometimes could even stay there, provided they were people of uncommon ability. Corporals were promoted to be colonels. Able-bodied seamen died as admirals. Obscure ink-slingers in remote Government offices could look forward to ending their careers as members of the senate, now the highest Government body in the state, for the only things the Tsar demanded were a fair amount of honesty (one could not expect perfection at a moment's notice!) and a knowledge of how to keep books or draw up codes of law or discover a new method by which a few more kopecks could be squeezed out of his subjects.

The patriarch of Moscow, a heavily garbed and golden-crowned dignitary who was very proud of the fact that he administered the Church in exactly the same style as that of six hundred years before, found himself deprived of his office. A Holy Synod, the members of which were appointed directly by the Tsar himself, turned the Church into merely another governmental department, like that of the army, navy, justice, the treasury, or the street-cleaning office.

These new men worked like beavers. They were like Lenin's assistants during the first ten years of the great Bolshevik experiment. Many of them died at their desks from sheer exhaustion. Only the Tsar himself never showed signs of growing tired. He worked and drank and made life miserable for the women at his court, but mostly he worked, and if he was hard on his subordinates he was infinitely harder on himself. For now his hands had at last found a new job worthy of his Gargantuan energies and ambitions.

In the year 1702 Peter reconquered the southern shores of what is now called the Gulf of Finland, a deserted piece of territory the Swedes had occupied in the year 1617. There, on the twenty-ninth of June of the year 1703, Peter laid the first stone of the fortress of Peter and Paul, which was to be the citadel and nucleus of his new capital. Less than a year later, there were enough houses ready to move a few families into the city of Peter, which Lenin, who realized Peter's greatness and his

essentially Russian character, never wanted to be called after himself, though to-day it is called Leningrad instead of St Petersburg.

Then the Tsar went ahead with his building programme in a big way. Forty thousand serfs from all over Russia were driven into this marshy region along the shores of the Neva to work on his far-flung projects. These poor creatures died like flies. Malaria, cholera, typhus—all of them were present. Often only half of the poor slaves were well enough to do anything at all. But the job had to be done. In the year 1712 the Tsar could move into his first residence, the so-called Summer Palace. A few years later he also had his Winter Palace on the spot where the famous picture-gallery of the Hermitage stands to-day. In 1724 the remains of St Alexander Nevsky, the great Russian hero of the wars against the Tartars, were reverently removed from Moscow to the new capital, and in the year in which Peter died, 1725, his city already counted more than seventy-five thousand inhabitants.

The Tsar's immediate successors did their best to turn the tide and tried very hard to re-establish Moscow as the national capital. But it could not be done. The tide insisted on running in the opposite direction. St Petersburg continued to grow and increase just as long as Russia was trying to be a European Power. It took the Bolsheviki, with their profound understanding of the true Russian character, to undo what the Romanovs had done and to go back to Moscow. Since then, Peter's "window on the west" has lost all its imperial glamour. It has, in spite of its vast number of inhabitants, become a provincial town where the grass grows in the streets and where the empty windows of deserted palaces look down in deep despair upon the deserted avenues of what had been the dream of empire-minded Peter.

Peter died on February 7 (January 28 of our calendar) of the year 1725. As happened almost every year, the Neva had passed beyond its banks and had flooded the city. The Tsar was in a boat, doing his best to save people who had fled to the roofs of their houses. One of his sailors fell overboard. The Tsar jumped after him. He saved the man but caught a cold. The cold developed into pneumonia, and the alcohol-soaked body of the Emperor could offer but little resistance. He died ten days later, amid the grateful prayers of his subjects.

From a backward, medieval country Peter had turned Russia into a powerful modern nation. One often hears this question asked: would it not have been better if he had left well enough alone and had not wasted his energies upon so hopeless a task? But when he died the deed had been done, and it had been the work of one single man. Wherefore I think that I should now put him under my historical microscope, which is a curious instrument that works by the reflected light of several



intervening centuries, and study him a little more carefully to find out what kind of creature he really had been.

The first thing I then notice is his absolute—his hundred per cent.—Russianism. He might pretend that he loved the civilization of the West, but he cared for it only in so far as it could be of any benefit to his own people. Hence his insistence upon letting the work be done just as much as possible by people of Slavic blood. In the beginning he was of course obliged to hire a great many foreigners. But he did so reluctantly and only on condition that they allow themselves to be Russianized as fast as possible.

Another characteristic that strikes me when I have him a little better focused is his knowledge and understanding of the real Russian soul, to use that rather hackneyed expression once more for lack of a better one. This was and is a very curious development. The man who did more to upset that Russian soul than any other ruler who ever occupied the Muscovite throne understood his subjects much better than any of the so-called typically Russian tsars who either preceded or succeeded him.

Peter was, furthermore, completely Slavic in the mystic qualities of his religious conceptions. These did not prevent him from being on several occasions one of the most cruel despots of the last five hundred years. Whenever he met with the slightest opposition to his plans, he knew no mercy, and even his own son—his only son, at that—fell a victim of his father's determination to accomplish his plans regardless of every other consideration.

This boy, Alexius by name, was a pathetic case. While still very young he had been taken away from his mother. Peter had grown tired of her and had packed her off to a cloister, after first forcing her to become a nun. Left to his own devices, Alexius had made common cause with his father's enemies—the men of the old régime. When the Tsar heard of this he condemned the boy to death. To this day we do not know for sure whether the sentence was actually carried out or in what manner the heir to the throne came to his end. But the best guess, based upon the most reliable evidence, has Alexius dying as the result of a blow from his father's cane. Peter never showed any signs of repentance. He probably felt that a son of his had no right to have such a thin skull.

So much for his truly Slavic characteristics. Un-Russian, on the other hand, were his terrific scientific curiosity and his capacity for steady hard work. But he was entirely Slavic again in his conception of his duties and rights as a divinely anointed autocrat. He was convinced that it was the Almighty Himself who had bestowed his high office upon him, not to use it for his own benefit but that he might the better be able in this way to serve his subjects. Hence his detestation of any kind of abuse of power

on the part of his subordinates. If one of his subjects considered himself unfairly treated by an imperial official (be he corporal or Minister of State) he could always place his evidence before the Emperor, whose door was wide open, both day and night, to those who wished to approach him on such serious matters. If the petitioner was found to be right, the offending official would be hanged. Did the petitioner fail to prove his point, he himself would suffer a similar fate, for it was up to God's anointed to see that justice be done.

At the same time this inspired mystic could be guilty of crimes against human decency which make us see him in the light of another Genghis Khan. Like so many Russians (even in our own days), he seems to have been born without nerves. The aspect of human misery never disturbed him in his slumbers, and whether a hundred or a hundred thousand people died building his capital was a matter of no consequence to the man who had drawn up the blueprints.

That lack of any kind of moral equilibrium becomes very evident in the way he treated his peasants. As I just said, he would come down with the full force of his heavy boots upon any landowner who had been unduly cruel to one of his serfs. But that his exaggerated demands for revenue were causing these landowners to work their peasants like dray-horses and to keep them going day and night by means of the knout—well, that was something else again and something which never seems to have struck him as somewhat irrational.

It will always be very difficult for a Dutchman or an American to understand a Russian or to be entirely fair to him. There are too many absolutely contradictory elements in the Slavic make-up to give us western Europeans something definite of which we can catch hold. In Peter's case, however, there was one outstanding characteristic we are able to follow throughout his whole career. He worked in superlatives. He did not believe in compromises. There must be no pulling of punches. When Peter cheated, he cheated with all his heart and soul. When he lied, ditto. When he decided to tell the truth, as he did upon a few occasions, one could take him at his word. When he prayed, he meant every word he said, but this would not prevent him, the next moment, from having an entire regiment of rebellious soldiers knouted to death. And when he went empire-building or city-building or palace-building, his empire or his city or his palace must be constructed on a planetary scale—streets three hundred feet wide, market-places ten times as large as the Roman Forum, gaols for a thousand tenants at a time.

And when, after a short debauch in holiness, Peter decided to go in for the other extreme and wallow for a while in filth and dirt and muck, he then dived right in and with such abandon that he made old Henry VIII

look like a Methodist deacon. In short, he was entirely human, only a great deal more so than most people.

A far different person was his lifelong opponent, the austere and ascetic Charles of Sweden. No tender or untender female lips ever touched his, after he had been presented with his first razor. The same held good for alcoholic drinks at a time when Sweden was still proud to be counted among the hardest-drinking countries of the north—Finland included. He evinced some semblance of natural affection for his sister, but outside this young princess, the human race, as far as he was concerned, did not exist.

That, however, does not mean that we need feel sorry for Charles. For if it be true (I have undoubtedly said *this* before) that only those people are happy who can play that rôle which satisfies them most in their own eyes, then Charles was indeed one of the most fortunate of men. Above all other things, this strange despot was an actor, an observation for which, had I made it in his presence, he would have had me shot.

One prima donna in a family (whether it be of royal or common origin) is usually enough to spoil the taste for any more for quite a long time among those who have had to put up with it. The Vasa family had produced that kind of performer when the wife of the great Gustavus Adolphus gave birth to a girl who ought to have been a boy and who arrived in this world so densely covered with hair that, according to the first reports, she was said to be of the male gender. When Charles was born in the year 1682, Cousin Christina was still very much alive, but she had fortunately left her native land a great many years before, after having done about as much harm as any woman has ever done to the state entrusted to her care. She was to return twice, the last time fifteen years before Charles was born. During her final effort in 1667 to regain the throne which she had given up in disgust, she had not even been allowed to get as far as Stockholm. The official excuse for this refusal to let her visit her former home was the fact that she had abjured her Protestant faith and had become a Catholic. The real reason was quite different. The Swedes had grown thoroughly disgusted with the unpleasant publicity which their country had gained in consequence of her Majesty's desire to keep herself firmly in the limelight.

I have discussed this problem with several learned Swedish historians, who invariably told me that I was wrong and that it was some other queer kink in her character which had made her play the far from edifying rôle for which she is chiefly remembered. They may be right, but then again we in the New World know a little more about the strange things a bad case of 'publicity itch' will do to those afflicted with that unfortunate malady.

Cousin Christina, who had left everything in a hopeless state of confusion (among other little details, she had given away half of the crown domains to her personal friends), had been succeeded by Charles XI. He was only four years old and had therefore been placed under the regency of a council composed of those great nobles who, having helped Gustavus Adolphus make Sweden great, now felt that they were entitled to do a bit of plundering of their own. They were highly successful but not for very long, for when the young King reached the age of twenty he got rid of the whole pack of them and did the only practical thing that could be done if the nation was to be saved from complete ruin—he made himself dictator. Therefore, when Charles XII was born, on June 17, 1682, Sweden was once more on the road to solvency, once more had an efficient army, and was again regarded by the rest of the world as the dominant factor in northern European politics. But of democracy in our sense of the word there was not a vestige, and nobody cared.

The mother of little Charles, Ulrica Leonora, was a princess of Denmark. She therefore came from the country with which the Swedes had fought the bitterest of their wars during the last four hundred years. But the royal union had made Denmark an ally and, as a result, the whole of the Baltic was now in Swedish hands. Russia, of course, always lay in the distance, but it was not considered a serious menace. It was too poor and too badly organized to be of any particular consequence.

As for the young Crown Prince, he was everything a country could have found in its ruler during a crisis. From his father he had inherited a strong love for horses and fast riding, a sport which stood him in good stead later in life when he rode from the Black Sea to the Baltic, straight across Europe, before anyone had even heard of his escape. As soon as he had been able to hold himself in the saddle (he acquired this difficult balancing feat at the age of four), he had accompanied his father the King on all his tours of inspection. He therefore had a first-hand knowledge of all the details of government, such as army posts, dockyards, harbours, stud farms, factories, and storehouses for grain and gunpowder, and he knew about all these things at an age when most children still identify foreign countries with the pictures on their postage stamps.

But Papa, who was a man of strong prejudices and tastes and as conscientious in his duties as any Prussian king of the seventeenth century, had also given his offspring three other avocations. Those were a love for bear-hunting, a thorough dislike of everything French, and a profound distrust of anything connected with the art of diplomacy.

Therefore, when Charles XI died (only forty-two years old), it seemed quite natural that this boy of fifteen should succeed him right away, and Charles was promptly elevated to the throne. Already at his coronation

he showed that he intended to be quite as much of an autocrat as his father had been. He did not bother to take the oath connected with the coronation services by which he should have acknowledged himself to be the first servant of the State. Without further ado he put the royal crown upon his own head. His Ministers and advisers did not approve of this, but they carefully refrained from asking embarrassing questions. It already had become common knowledge in Stockholm that this young man was exceedingly taciturn by nature and never more reluctant to reveal his opinions than when urged to do so.

Outside his Majesty's country, these characteristics were less clearly understood. They were mistaken for shyness and weakness of character and promptly there was a coalition among the loving neighbours of Sweden, each one of whom hoped to regain part of the territories he had lost during the previous fifty years when his armies had been no match for the magnificently drilled troops of great Gustavus Adolphus and his successors. Denmark, Poland (now ruled over by a Saxon), and Russia made common cause and got ready to settle their old scores.

In the year 1700 Frederick Augustus of Saxony began the war by marching against the city of Riga. Charles was then eighteen years old and was supposed to be finishing his education. Instead of which, he forced his unwilling admirals to navigate a certain channel that had never been tried before, landed in Denmark before anyone knew he was on his way, and forced the Danes to sue for peace just before he was ready to storm the walls of Copenhagen.

From Denmark the unexpected conqueror turned eastward to relieve Riga, but when he heard that Narva was about to fall to the Russians, he gave orders to proceed to that city. Every one of his generals advised against such a move. They told their King that it was a most foolhardy adventure and could lead only to disaster. It was the middle of November, the roads were impassable, and the Russians so greatly outnumbered the Swedes that there was no possible chance of defeating them. On November 19 Charles's army was nine miles away from Narva, and the King ordered fires to be lighted to inform the garrison that help was near. The next morning it snowed. Shortly after the hour of noon the snow-storm changed into a blizzard. At two o'clock, when visibility was nil, Charles attacked Peter and so completely destroyed his army that, had he cared to do so, he would have been able to take Moscow.

It was a fact well known to the Swedes that Peter was at the height of his unpopularity, that the country was rife with rebellion, and that all the more conservative elements in Russia were eagerly praying for some foreign saviour to set them free from their Antichrist. Unfortunately for the Swedes, Charles by now had got it into his obstinate head that he

must first of all punish Augustus of Saxony for his treason of the year before. His political advisers and all of his generals begged him to follow up his first success with an immediate attack upon the remnants of Peter's forces. The self-willed young man turned his back upon his Ministers and his staff and started on a wild-goose chase after Augustus. Peter, so he said, could wait, for by now the young King was suffering from a victory complex—that unfortunate Narva complex which still affects so many of his modern fellow-countrymen. He felt convinced that he could always and in all circumstances beat the Russians, no matter how great the odds, and that is where he was mistaken. For though the Muscovites were still barbarians and individually could not at all compare with the excellently disciplined Swedish privates, commanded by highly trained officers, Charles did not in the least understand the character of his Slavic opponents and he had sadly underrated their power of recuperation.

In consequence whereof, Charles wasted precious years marching up and down the dreary wastes of Poland, and when at last he turned once more against the Russians it was too late. Peter had used this interval of seven years to reorganize his army and waited for Charles near Poltava. A few days before the battle took place Charles had been wounded during a reconnaissance. Instead of taking to his bed, as his surgeons had told him, he had a chair rigged up between two horses so that he could take part in the fighting. He seems to have forgotten that a disabled commander with an exhausted and hungry army is not in an ideal position to gain any kind of victory, especially when his opponent has destroyed everything within his path so that there is nothing for either his men or his horses to eat.

At Poltava Charles tried to repeat the method that had been so successful at Narva, but this time luck was against him. The Cossack reinforcements upon whom he had set such great hopes failed to materialize. Instead of bringing him a hundred thousand cavalymen as Mazeppa, the Cossack chieftain from southern Russia, had promised, he brought only one thousand, and the reinforcements that had been expected from Sweden had been annihilated by a fourfold force of Russian troops.

Then General Winter appeared upon the scene. The winter of 1708-9 was the worst northern Europe had ever known. Birds, so the old chroniclers relate, were killed by the frost while flying through the air. It was impossible to light fires, for the wood would not ignite in the open. Even the wine froze in its flasks. But Charles, although his army had suffered terrific losses, doggedly stuck to his original plan of a direct attack. The memory of Narva dominated his mind, and as soon as summer had come and the roads were passable again, he hastened to repeat his former success.

Seated in his chair, Charles gave the order of attack. During the first two hours it looked as if the Swedes, by sheer superiority of their fighting spirit, would once again be able to roll up the armies of the Tsar. Then fatigue and exhaustion began to tell. Next there was a surprise—a very painful one.

Whereas Charles had wasted his money on his costly and futile campaign against Augustus of Saxony, Peter had spent his subjects' taxes upon the latest and most modern guns that were then being manufactured in Germany and France. His cannon fired four times as fast as those of the Swedes, and soon most of Charles's army was gone. The rest, hopelessly outnumbered, were forced to surrender. Charles was left with less than fifteen hundred horsemen and with those he now took refuge on Turkish territory. There he remained for five full years and during those five years he overcame his former distaste for diplomacy. From his tent in the steppes he kept the whole of Europe agitated about his fate. He also made repeated attempts to persuade the Turkish Government in Constantinople to declare war against Russia. Invariably he discovered that the Russians, being much richer than he, had offered the grand vizier a great deal more money to do the exact opposite. In the end, even the Turks grew tired of this absurd comedy. They stormed Charles's camp at Bender and made him a prisoner.

Charles took his new misfortune with his usual superior indifference. He remained where he was for another fifteen months and kept up his diplomatic intrigues as if he were still a free man. He also hoped against hope that fresh troops would reach him from Sweden, in which case he would at last be able to settle his score both with Poland and Russia.

When he realized that the game was up—definitely up—the King mounted his horse and, accompanied by a single aide, rode straightway from Demotika (where he was being held by the Turks) to Stralsund, on the Baltic, where he was once more on Swedish territory. (He started on September 20 and arrived on November 11.)

Europe, which had come to regard Charles as something out of a story-book and which held him—the defeated monarch—in such awe that he had by now become the real hero of all his disastrous campaigns, held its breath while Stralsund was slowly being destroyed by the enemy's gunfire. What would come next? In Sweden, the people had long since begun to murmur that by now enough had been done for their country's glory and that the moment had come to talk of peace. An honourable peace was still among the political possibilities, but Charles, with the bit between his teeth, could not be stopped. When Stralsund fell, he crossed the Baltic and, after an absence of fourteen years, he once more set foot on his native soil. Carefully hiding himself in Stockholm, where he

remained only a few days, he now carried the war into Norway, which, being then under Danish domination, gave him an opportunity to attack Denmark.

Sweden, exhausted as few countries have ever been, its man-power gone, its money spent, its trade ruined, its credit destroyed, had somehow remained loyal. In December of the year 1718 Charles laid siege to the strong Norwegian fortress of Fredriksten. His foremost trench was only eight hundred feet from the walls of the citadel, and Charles (need I tell?) was in the foremost part of this trench. He arose from behind the earthen wall to get a better view of the situation. The next moment he lay dead with a bullet through his brain.

I doubt very much whether we shall ever find out who fired that fatal shot. Almost at once there were ugly rumours that one of his own soldiers had killed the King, so that peace might return to poor, lacerated Sweden. But others who had been on the spot and who had examined his Majesty's body after it had been carried to his tent swore that the bullet had entered the skull from the front and therefore must have been fired by an enemy. To-day, of course, the incident has value only as an antiquarian puzzle. The important fact was this—Charles no longer lived, and the Swedes were given a short breathing-spell. God knows, they needed it. Within less than twenty years this young man had been able to undo a century of laborious efforts on the part of his ancestors. The dream of empire had been gambled away, and Sweden had been reduced to the rank of a third-rate Power, while Russia arose as the dominant factor in northern Europe.

So much for the concrete results of Charles's endless errors.

Yet I can well understand the honour and esteem and affection in which this dashing knight is still held by most Swedes. They lead rather dull and unexciting lives, and Charles adds an element of glamour to their otherwise drab existence, a bit of colour which they seem to need almost as much as an occasional glimpse of the warm sun of Italy. Charles, as they will confess, was perhaps a good deal of a fool, but what a magnificent and glorious fool he had been! As a leader of men he was unsurpassed in the loyalty he evoked in those who followed him. Men would stand guard over his tent until they were frozen and they would die without a murmur, as long as they knew that their King was safe. Parents whose sons had disappeared in some Siberian prison-camp blessed his name. There were bitter complaints about the sad state of the nation—the general poverty, the loss of territory—but for all these the King's advisers were held to blame while his own memory remained unsullied.

For Charles had been possessed of one quality which the world has always held in such high esteem that it is willing to forgive all sorts of



deficiencies and shortcomings on the part of its heroes, provided this one trait of character is present.

Charles was the incarnation of the old ideal of chivalry. For that reason, men will remember him and will revere his memory long after their lesser heroes have become a handful of dust and a date in a school-book which little boys must learn by heart if they hope to get an A on their report cards.

Our Russo-Swedish Saturday too is one which Frits and I shall always remember. We knew beforehand that we would have two very individualistic gentlemen on our hands (to express it mildly), but we had hardly anticipated to what extremes their individualism would lead them.

It was only six o'clock, but I had called for Frits at the Middelburg station and had not bothered to go home. We never dressed (not quite knowing how those we had invited would be situated in the matter of clothes), and so we always wore dark suits, but nothing very formal. We still had an hour before us and were talking of this and that and of nothing much in particular. We even wondered whether it would be quite polite if we had a glass of sherry before our guests arrived, but we said, "Yes, why not?" And so Frits shouted (electric bells were, of course, out of the question in Veere), "Oh, Jo-o-o! Bring us two glasses of sherry, will you-u-u!"

And then a soft voice added, "Make it three, for it is a cold day, and I could stand a bit of warming cheer."

Without our noticing it, Erasmus had joined us. We were accustomed to his mysterious comings and goings, but as a rule he had been so punctual in not arriving too long before any of our other guests that we were somewhat surprised. He may have noticed this, for he offered what amounted to an explanation. "It is getting a bit cold these afternoons in that pleasant room you have given me, and I did not want to have the fire started, as I was coming over so soon anyway."

Poor Erasmus! He never could get really warm. He had suffered so much from cold when he was young that he had never caught up, like other people who, having been starved during the first half of their lives, will go on eating like famished wolves until the end of their days, not because they need all that extra fuel but out of sheer force of habit.

I had told Lucie how even in July and with a bit of a fire going Erasmus would sit in his chair and shiver. "Let me knit him a sweater," Lucie had suggested immediately. "A nice heavy fisherman's sweater like the one I made for Hein last year."

We all had applauded that generous suggestion, but then Lucie had certain misgivings. "How am I to know his size?" she asked. "And what

does he wear underneath that robe or cassock, or whatever it is called? As a child, when I saw a picture of the Pope, I always wanted to know what he wore underneath his long white garments—long trousers or short trousers or just a pair of running trunks or nothing at all? I suppose those were not nice thoughts for a little girl whose father was a general in our respectable Dutch Army, but I remember that I always was curious, and I once even asked our dominie, but he was very much shocked and he answered me that he did not know and did not want to know. It was bad enough for some one who was supposed to be a Christian to wear a golden crown and silken garments without going any further. I told him I knew all about the golden crown and the silken garments on the outside, and they were undoubtedly very wicked, but how about the Pope's trousers? I must have been four or five at the most when I started on this line of investigation, but it caused quite a scandal, the general's daughter asking the minister about the Pope's trousers. And even to-day I don't know, though I have spent a lot of time in Rome, for those things are hard to find out, and how am I going to decide the size of a sweater for Erasmus?"

Frits told her he would fix it, and the next time we called on the old gentleman I got very much interested in the Greek manuscript he was examining and meanwhile Frits slipped behind his chair and, using his handkerchief as a tape measure, got the approximate proportions according to which Lucie would have to do her knitting. She was now busy with her wool—a brilliant red wool—a mixture between vermilion and carmine—especially ordered from Paris.

"That will make him feel like a cardinal," Lucie explained, "and of course the colour does not matter, for no one will ever see him wear it."

She still needed several weeks to finish her sweater, and that fitted in beautifully with our plans, for then Sint Nikolaas would come round, and we had some very special plans for that day. It would be very difficult to find a suitable present for our learned old friend. A sweater would be just the thing.

But to return to a moment ago—there we were, the three of us, with Erasmus in his beloved chair by the corner of the fire, exchanging pleasant remarks with Jo, who had come to understand his old-fashioned Dutch quite well and could now give as good as she got, for the Dutch are no prudes, and they would have made marvellous officials at the court of Queen Bess.

Then Jo said she must go to her own home and start the vegetables.

"I have to apologize for something I have done," Erasmus began. Frits said that there was nothing in this world which he could think of

Erasmus doing for which he would ever have to apologize, "at least to us," he added as an afterthought, "but then, we are no theologians."

"Heaven forbid!" and Erasmus, as was his habit, lifted up both hands. "I am now free from that particular worry, but if you don't mind, I have asked a friend of mine for this evening."

"Wonderful!" said Frits. "Who is it?"

"Well, perhaps I had better not tell you and let him explain himself when he arrives."

"Jo-o-o!" Frits shouted, "make sure there is enough for one extra person and set a plate for him, will you-u-u!"

From the kitchen came the expected "*Ja-a-a!*" and then a very old voice, a bit shaky but still assertive, was heard to remark, "*Ça veut dire 'oui' en hollandais, n'est-ce pas?* In German too, I think, and it was the only word the great Frederick wanted to hear in the mouth of everybody else, but which he himself could not pronounce."

There was no possibility of mistaking the man who had spoken to us. I remembered the definition our witty Lucie had once given of him—"a brain on sticks." The mighty brain was there—a dome as high as that of St Peter's—and the sticks were there too, for one could no longer call them legs. Like the rest of the body, they seemed to have reached a point where they had ceased to exist for themselves and had but one single purpose left—they must support the brain, which was really all that mattered.

But what struck us most was the smile. The mouth was toothless. The ageless face, however, was lit up by a smile that seemed to be made up of pity and understanding. After a lifetime of bitter struggle, of ceaseless warfare upon all that was stupid and cowardly and cruel and lacking in reason and at an age when most people are ready to spend their few remaining years cultivating their little gardens, old Voltaire had once more descended into the arena to espouse the cause of religious liberty. And the last fifteen years of his life (for when he died he was as old as Methuselah!) had been one of the most glorious episodes in man's eternal fight upon the powers of darkness. It was the experiences of those last years which must have given him that insight into the mysterious ways in which the misguided human soul will sometimes work, its misdeeds to perform, and which alone could have been responsible for that wise and understanding smile which seemed to illuminate the whole of our room.

Voltaire bowed to Erasmus and motioned him not to rise. "I know you, sir," he said, "I know you well. Your *Praise of Folly* has often helped me through difficult hours when nothing else would divert my mind from some fresh disappointment, and although people seem to have been under the impression that I took everything lightly, I assure you that I did not.



VOLTAIRE WAS MERELY A BRAIN ON STICKS

Only I thought it usually wiser not to show what I felt. I loved that passage in which Folly talks to the King. I have seen her do it in my own day and with the same disastrous results."

"Please have a chair, sir," Frits said.

"But first of all," I begged him, "let me take your hat."

"Thank you. I should have worn my fur coat. It is quite a cool evening."

"It is always cold here," Erasmus complained.

"What would you, my learned Doctor?" Voltaire asked him. "After all, this is a land of water. There are canals wherever you look."

"Yes," I said with some malice, remembering what Voltaire had written when he left The Hague after his unhappy experience there as secretary of the French legation: "*Adieu, canards, canaux, canaille!*"

Voltaire held up both hands. "*Mon cher monsieur,*" he begged, "I said that in a moment of pique and after a very unhappy love affair. Unhappy love affairs do not make one feel very charitable; neither, for that matter, do happy ones!" And to Jo, offering him a glass of sherry. "*Madame est trop aimable,*" and continuing (for he never stopped talking), "I know you, madame. You belong to the one class of women I have always revered above all others."

"Oh, yes?" Jo asked, feeling very much flattered, for compliments are rare in Holland. "And who are those?"

"*Les cuisinières*, madame. The cooks. They surpass even the mothers. For we could undoubtedly have discovered some new way of begetting children, but a well-roasted chicken or a perfectly done dish of string beans—ah, these are something else again!"

"And just for that, you won't get any chicken to-night," said Jo, taking it up for the mothers.

"Then whatever else you are pleased to offer me, but tell me," pointing to the clasp that held her wide band of coral beads which are worn by all the women of Zeeland, "is that real gold?"

"Of course it is! Did you think I had bought them in some cheap French bazaar?"

Voltaire got up on his spindly legs and gave her a most gracious bow. "Madame," he said, "you score, and I am delighted to observe that the spirit of independence in this country has maintained itself so superbly throughout the centuries."

"And there is a lot more of it," said Jo.

"Which I hope you will show me later in the evening, but not in your cooking, for cooking is one of the arts, and the basis of all art is discipline."

I was delighted to hear him say this, for I had preached the same doctrine in all of my books. Then the thought struck me that I might

even have stolen it from him, but I decided not to go into the matter any further (at that moment at least), for I noticed that the old Frenchman was looking at me very intently. Having examined me carefully from head to foot, he finally spoke.

"Monsieur," he said, "this is the first time I have the pleasure of meeting you in the flesh."

"And a lot of it," Frits volunteered.

"Oh, well," Voltaire told him, "that is the way he was born. Now take me. I have eaten five meals a day every day of my long life. And not an ounce of fat could I put on. I have drunk twenty cups of coffee every day and I have slept like a log every night. It all depends how one is born. But to continue what I was just about to say, I know all about you, my dear sir."

"You don't mean to tell me," I said, "that you have read my books where you are now?"

"Alas, no. They would not last long in that rarefied atmosphere. But these last few years we have been made happy by the arrival of a great many Americans. A marvellous people, and I am glad they have done so well since my day."

"And they told you about me? That hardly seems possible."

"No, they did not. At least, not directly. But they have caused many improvements to be introduced. At least, that is what they call them, though I think the word is open to debate."

"What have those 'improvements' got to do with me?"

"Well, I do not want to divulge any secrets. It is this way. Every so many years we come up for a re-examination of our merits. One of your Americans is now in charge of a large new department—it covers about five thousand blocks in heaven and is entirely filled with tin boxes. In those boxes there are sheets of cardboard. On these cards stand revealed what posterity is saying about us."

"Good Lord!" Frits interrupted. "What a hopeless job!"

"Well, you see, we have all the trained help we need. There were always millions of people who loved just that kind of mechanical labour, and as they were too busy to do any harm they went to heaven. But knowing whom I was to have the honour of meeting this evening, I went through my own dossier. At first I could not find it. They are very systematic, your Americans. They had classified me under my original name. And I had to move all the way from the *V* to the *A*—you will remember Arouet. One of the attendants kindly helped me out, for it was a terrible distance—about a day's walk. I then discovered that in your books you have mentioned my name a great many times!"

"Ah," said Erasmus, "that gives me an idea. The next time I am in

that neighbourhood I shall find out how often my name appears in your books."

"I have already done so," Voltaire told him, beaming happily upon his Dutch friend. "You, my dear Doctor, beat me by one hundred and eighty-two entries. I shall have to make myself very agreeable to-night and perhaps I can add to my score."

Just then the clock struck seven. "Our other guests will be here in a moment now," Frits told us.

"Yes," Voltaire said, "and won't that be marvellous! At last I shall meet that most remarkable young man about whom I wrote with so much enthusiasm."

"Then you never met him before?"

"Of course not. How can one ever write with complete detachment about a person one really knows?"

There was an idea there, and I meant to explore it a little further, but at that moment the door opened and our other two guests arrived. Not only had they arrived, but they passed through the door at exactly the same moment, for neither of them apparently wanted to make room for the other. As they were rather thin, they could do this without causing any damage to our door.

We jumped to our feet, except Erasmus and Voltaire, whom we begged to remain seated.

"But their Majesties!" Voltaire objected.

"Not to-night," I told him. "To-night the real Majesties have already come."

We took the hats and coats of our guests. "Shall I take your swords, too?" Frits asked.

Both Peter and Charles shook their heads. "I prefer to keep mine," said Charles, in excellent German.

"So do I," said Peter, in very bad German.

"Then may we present our other guests?" Frits asked, and he mentioned the names of Erasmus and Voltaire.

Charles looked hard at Voltaire. "I seem to remember," he told him in pretty poor French, "having heard that you once wrote something about me."

"I had that honour, your Majesty."

"Yes, I heard about it. I hope it was better than the stuff they usually write about me."

"But surely, your Majesty," the Frenchman argued, bowing low and with the perfect grace of the experienced courtier, "one who has himself written such glorious pages in the book of living history need not worry about what we poor scribblers may say about him?"

"Rest assured," Charles answered him, "I don't. Besides, I don't like the French."

"Your Majesty, it is our loss."

"It is," said Charles, who never seemed to waste any unnecessary words.

While this passage at arms was going on, Peter had walked to the corner of the room, where he paused before Frits' radio.

"*Wat is?*" he asked, in something that was meant to be Dutch.

"A machine to catch the sounds that fly through the air," I answered, in something that was meant to be Russian.

"You speak our language?"

"Hardly, your Majesty. I picked it up—just a very little."

"Where?"

"In the city your Majesty founded."

"Ah, you have been there? Tell me all about it, but first show me how this thing works. I love machinery of every kind."

I turned the radio on. We got London, and some one was teaching children how to speak Italian. "That seems silly," said Peter. "Why don't they teach them how to handle arms? But the invention is interesting. Open the box. I want to see what is inside."

"I am sorry, your Majesty, but that box is locked, and we have lost the key."

"Oh, that is easily fixed," and pulling his sword out of its scabbard he prised the lid open. Then he put his hand inside and burned his fingers on one of the valves.

"*Godverdom!*" he swore beautifully in Dutch, "why didn't you warn me?"

"I didn't have time, your Majesty."

"A feeble excuse! Now tell me how it works."

Being completely devoid of any mechanical sense, I had to confess that I didn't know.

"That is the trouble with you clever people who write books. You have no practical sense. You would have been completely useless to me, but never mind—I will find out for myself," and suiting the action to the word he pulled out a coil of wire, with the result that the radio stopped, damaged beyond repair.

This, however, did not seem to bother Peter the least little bit. For he walked unconcernedly to the table, picked up our bottle of vodka, took out the cork, said, "Wonderful! After all these many years!" and poured half of its contents down his throat. Frits tried to save the situation by asking Charles, who all this time had been sitting in stony silence, whether perhaps he would care for a glass of aquavit.

"*Nej.*" said his Majesty of Sweden, "I am not a drunkard."



Peter did not miss the remark. "It would have been better for you, my dear cousin," he said, "if occasionally you had taken a few drops. It would have reminded you that you are human." Then Peter went to the other corner of the room where Frits' beloved old Frisian clock was hanging from the wall. He clapped his hands, as happy as a child. "I remember those clocks," he shouted. "I had one in Zaandam—just like this one. I took it apart, but I never could quite put it together again. This time I will do better. Take it down and give it to me."

Frits shuddered. "Suppose, your Majesty," he suggested, "that we wait until after dinner. We don't want to serve you cold food."

"Food! Bah! Who cares about food when he can take a clock apart?" the Tsar asked.

"I do," came from Charles.

"That is the first time I heard about it," was Peter's uncomplimentary remark, and Frits and I realized that we were in for some pretty heavy going. But with Voltaire and Erasmus there to pour oil upon the troubled waters of the Baltic, we felt convinced that somehow or other we would be able to prevent an open outbreak of hostilities, and so we sat down, but we were very careful to separate our two honourable guests. Voltaire was supposed to take care of Charles, while Erasmus was to look after the Russian.

The arrangement worked like a charm. Peter had picked up quite a lot of Dutch during the weeks he had worked in Holland as a plain carpenter in a Zaandam shipyard. Unfortunately the expressions he used were not exactly those with which Erasmus could possibly be familiar. Even Frits and I, who were often complimented upon our knowledge of the stevedore and coal-heaver vernacular, were occasionally stumped, whereupon Peter laughed so loudly that the candles on the table shook in their holders and he favoured us with a few more choice expressions, many of which bore evidence of having been slightly Russified, for they invariably contained references to some one's canine ancestry.

As for Voltaire, I will say that he did his best, but Charles nobly lived up to his reputation for taciturnity. At one moment, trying to make myself very pleasant, I offered some comment in what I hoped was Swedish. Charles gave me a cold stare.

"I dare say that was supposed to be Swedish?" he asked.

"It was, your Majesty."

"Where did you learn it?"

"In Stockholm, your Majesty."

"Well, you must have had a very bad teacher," and that was the end of any further efforts on my part to address him in his native tongue.

At that moment there was an interruption. The telephone rang. It

was Jimmie, who told me that Horace Liveright had tried to reach me from New York but would call again the next morning.

"Where is New York?" Peter asked.

"In America, your Majesty."

"And where is America?"

"At the other side of the ocean, your Majesty."

"I don't believe it," said Peter. "I must look at this contraption for myself. Could you use that 'thing' to talk to my town as well?"

"We could, your Majesty."

"Then do it."

"We don't know anybody to call up there, your Majesty."

"Call up the Tsar. Tell him I want to talk to him. I, Piotr Aleksyeevich."

"There is no longer a tsar in Russia, your Majesty."

"You are a liar. There always will be a tsar in Russia. Here, let me have that thing. I will try it out myself." And hastily swallowing the rest of his vodka, Peter got up and went to the telephone, Frits following him with an expression of despair on his face.

As soon as he had left us, Charles suddenly unbent. "Gentlemen," he said, "I must apologize. You must think me a very ill-bred person. I do not, I assure you, intend to repay you for your very generous hospitality by this act of boorishness. But this Russian person—this brute—this savage—has always affected me this way. Even now he gets on my nerves. But let us use this moment's welcome respite to talk of pleasanter things and allow the King of Sweden to drink your very good health," and lifting his glass of wine (he had discovered that Erasmus and Voltaire were having Liebfraumilch), he hailed us in a most elegant Swedish fashion, a very singular honour, for it is not often that royalty takes the initiative in such matters. After this ceremony he begged my pardon for having spoken so curtly to me.

"I have such an intense dislike for this creature over there," he said, pointing to Peter in the corner, who just then was arguing violently with some one in the Amsterdam central office and insisting that he be given the Imperial Palace in St Petersburg, "that it freezes my blood to have to be in the same room with him. But tell me all about Stockholm. I hardly knew the city. I left it when I was quite young and only saw it for a few days after I returned. Has the royal palace been rebuilt and on the same spot?"

I took a pad of paper and quickly sketched those parts of the loveliest of all cities I remembered best. Parts of my pictures he recognized, and he became the most charming of companions, full of that quiet courtesy for which all his companions had praised him during those many and exceedingly trying years he had passed in semi-captivity in Turkey.

At that moment, Peter returned from his telephonic investigations. He

had accomplished nothing at all except that he had run up a terrific long-distance bill and caused us to be visited two days later by an official of the Royal Netherlands Postal Department with a formal complaint about the "inadmissible language" which had been used over one of Her Majesty's telephones. Peter, however, seemed quite elated and happy, for he had finally heard a few words of genuine Russian at the other end of the line, but Charles immediately dropped back into his mood of gloomy silence and neither ate nor drank, nor did he speak, for the rest of that evening.

The rest of that evening, however, did not last very long. For Peter, amid much joviality, having just finished his own bottle of vodka and Charles's bottle of aquavit, had now caught sight of the cognac which was supposed to be passed round with the coffee. "Ah!" he said delightedly, "a bottle of that marvellous French wine! I love it. It tastes better than anything else, and one cannot possibly get drunk on it."

He thereupon completely filled one of Frits' Napoleon glasses (which are supposed to be served with about three spoonfuls of the fiery beverage) to the very brim, lifted it to us, shouted, "*Zdorovye!*" poured it down his throat, and promptly passed out of the picture, his head landing on the table with a loud bang.

Charles got up. "*Förbannade fyllesvin,*" was all he said. Then to us, "I am very sorry, gentlemen, but this is too much for me. And so I hope that you will excuse me. Especially you, my dear Monsieur de Voltaire, and you, most learned Doctor. I deeply regret that this has happened. But it is impossible for me to stay any longer." And taking his hat and his long blue cape, he honoured us with a very military click of the heels and walked out of the house.

It was a painful moment, but we could not blame him. Peter's behaviour had been abominable. As we could not let him lie there with his head in his plate, we tried to pick him up. He seemed to weigh at least a ton, and we despaired of getting him as far as the sofa. However, the cold air that had rushed into the room the moment Charles had opened the door must have revived him somewhat, for he regained consciousness, looked around him angrily, and shouted, "And so, the little Swede bastard is gone! Then I had better follow him, for if he does not have some one to look after him, he may get lost or walk into one of your canals. Thank you for a nice party. That was first-rate vodka, but I suppose I should not have touched that bottle of cognac. Well, it can't be helped now. Such things will happen, won't they? And now, *goede-nacht,*" and taking his hat in his hand and rolling up his cape so that he could carry it under his arm, he unsteadily stumbled out of the room.

Voltaire was the first to speak. "*Oh là là!*" he said, "and that is the



PETER THE GREAT, IN A DRUNKEN STUPOR, FELL DOWN ON THE TABLE

kind of people who rule the world. And for such people, hundreds of thousands of humble subjects are supposed to give their lives! For such people, whole countries are devastated!"

Erasmus agreed with him. "I should bring out a new edition of my *Praise of Folly*," he told us. "This evening, I have learned a great many new things."

But we still had an hour to spare, and during that hour, Frits and I sat and listened to the brightest and the wittiest and sometimes the wisest conversation we had ever heard or ever expected to hear. With the result that after Voltaire and Erasmus were gone, we remained in our chairs in front of our little open fire and continued to talk for at least two hours, when at last I took my leave and made for home.

It was a dark and stormy night. Wild clouds were racing past a watery moon. I decided to take a short walk, for I felt badly in need of a little fresh air. My road led past the old church, and from there, after crossing the bridge, I found myself among the open fields. By the light of the moon I noticed two figures in a near-by pasture. They had shed their capes and hats, but I recognized them at once. They were engaged in a fast and furious battle of swords. I felt that it was my duty to intervene, but just when I was on the point of making my presence known, the smaller one of the two ran his rapier through the chest of his opponent. The wounded man bellowed like a stricken ox, but only once. Then he fell forward on his face with such violence that the sword of his enemy snapped and broke, the upper part remaining stuck in his chest.

I decided that I had better go home. If there was to be an inquest, I might be called upon as a witness and I did not want to be mixed up in a case of this sort.

But there never was any inquest. I met our policeman the next morning, and after we had commented upon the weather and had told each other that autumn was almost over and now it soon would be winter, I asked him whether everything was quiet in the village.

"Never knew it to be so peaceful," he told me. "Not since after that evening when you had those two drunken organ-grinders at Mynheer Frits' house. You remember those wild-looking men who started a fight and hit each other over the head with the wine bottles? And whom I had to put into the clink? Since that evening nothing at all has happened in our town."

"That's fine," I said, "for that is why we live here. Because nothing ever happens in our little city."

Then I offered him one of my best American cigars, which I carried especially for such occasions, and he, after some urging, took two, and we each went our way, happy that we were allowed to live in a village where nothing ever happened.



TWO SHADOWY FIGURES WERE DUELLING IN THE MOONLIGHT

## CHAPTER XVI

### DANTE and LEONARDO DA VINCI Come to Dine, the Latter of Whom Drops in in the Literal Sense of the Word

AND now," I said to Frits when we met for luncheon on Sunday, "how about a really quiet and peaceful party after all this violence?"

"It would be a pleasant change."

"I think I can arrange it. The people I have in mind would have nothing to quarrel about."

"Who are they?"

"One of them was the final chapter of the Middle Ages. The other was the most interesting chapter of the Renaissance."

"Do they carry swords and do they drink vodka, aquavit, and cognac all at the same time? You should have seen the mess in my dining-room this morning!"

"They don't carry swords, and as far as I know neither of them would touch a drop of anything except perhaps a glass or two of their mild Italian wine."

"In that case, go ahead and invite them."

And that is how it came about that the same evening the old lion on the steps of the town hall found himself sitting on a scrap of paper containing the names of Dante Alighieri of Florence and Leonardo from the village of Vinci.

I had only the haziest idea of what I should offer Dante. During the Middle Ages macaroni and spaghetti were not the common articles of food they are in the Italy of to-day, and we could not very well offer polenta to a man who during so many years of his life had been dependent for his living upon the mercy of a family called Polenta. I would have to think Dante's menu out, and most carefully.

Leonardo, we felt, we could satisfy according to his taste. He had spent a great deal of his time at the court of France, and we had quite a collection of old French cookery books. But to be on the safe side with Dante, I decided to begin our dinner with a Dutch vegetable soup. After that, there would have to be something muttonish, for veal would have been very rare in medieval Italy. The French cookery books of that period made quite an ado about something that was then considered a great delicacy—mutton done in butter with tomatoes and olives. That would

be a novelty for our guests, as neither Dante nor Leonardo could ever have tasted a tomato. The love-apple had been brought to Europe by the early Spanish explorers, but it had been grown only for ornamental purposes until the end of the eighteenth century, being until then considered poisonous and therefore unfit for human consumption. But I decided to take a chance with this pleasant fruit, and Jo was given the recipe for *noisettes de mouton aux tomates* and told not to forget that her slices of tomato must be served with an anchovy rolled on top of each one.

As the people of the Middle Ages (and of the Renaissance too, for that matter) had never been very great vegetable-eaters, I thought that Dutch carrots with a plentiful garnishing of parsley would do as well as any other vegetable. Potatoes? Our guests would most probably not care for them, and I thought it safer to order stewed corn. This we imported from America in cans, as the Dutch corn never grows tall enough to be eaten by human beings and is only used to feed the cattle.

For dessert we could have the famous *flamiches* of the sixteenth century, which were a kind of cheese cake. In case our guests did not like these, we would have all sorts of real cheese, for was there ever an Italian who did not take to cheese as a Scotsman takes to haggis?

The wine problem was easily settled. Any kind of 'red ink'—any kind of that cheap Chianti which is about the best known of all Italian articles of export—would be satisfactory. A better wine would be a waste of money and effort, for our guests would not notice the difference, being in that respect undoubtedly quite as untrained as the average modern American.

The music had to be chosen carefully, for both our guests were very much interested in this subject. Of Leonardo we knew that he had been a first-rate lute-player and had made all sorts of experiments with those instrumental combinations which were so popular during the beginning of the Renaissance. As for Dante, he himself had told about his love for sweet melodies when he described how in Purgatory he had come across Pietro Casella, a famous madrigal writer of the thirteenth century who had been one of his favourite composers.

As there is, however, very little music of that era that has come down to us, and none of it by Casella, I decided to start out with one of the records of Guillaume Dufay which we had played with so much success the night Sir Thomas More called on Erasmus. It was his *Alma Redemptoris Mater*. In addition to this, I sent for Guillaume de Machaut's Credo and Sanctus from the Mass he had composed for the coronation of Charles V of France in the year 1364. The rest would be more specially for Leonardo, and for him I chose Jacopo Peri's *Gioite al canto mio* from his opera *Euridice* and Claudio Monteverdi's *Lasciatemi morire* and two



airs from his *Incoronazione di Poppea*. And, in order that we would not run out of records (for what would these two Italians who were so completely different in every respect have to say to each other?) I added Domenico Cimarosa's overture to his *Matrimonio segreto* and Attilio Ariosti's song for soprano and viola d'amore.

We already had most of Segovia's records for the guitar, and these masterpieces of dexterity would delight Leonardo, who had been quite famous in his own right as a guitar-player. Should he tire of music, Leonardo, like all good painters, would be perfectly happy with a piece of paper and a pencil and might even be persuaded to follow the example of Giotto and Taddeo Gaddi and give us a good portrait of Dante.

Knowing how much he had liked working in red chalk, I borrowed some of it from Lucie. I felt sure that in this way he would be quite contented, and Dante, if he felt bored, could just sit and brood. We were learning a great deal about the famous ones of this earth. And we had come to the conclusion that it was absolutely impossible to make any predictions about the sort of people they would prove to be. Genius, apparently, could be brilliant, and genius, also, could be extremely dull. We would have to trust to luck.

Here is my report on Dante as I sent it to Amsterdam by special delivery.

Dear Frits: I am afraid that to our younger generation Dante has become a taste that has to be acquired like a love for figs or meat-roll. He is so far removed from our own times that it is very difficult for us to establish any kind of direct contact with this lonely wanderer who, in despair at the world in which he lived, found an escape in a visit to heaven and hell.

I am beginning to feel more and more that there is little use in my sending you long Plutarchian essays upon the lives of people who have been written up (and down) as frequently as those of most of our guests of the last three months. In the case of Dante, there even have been, and there still are, regular chairs of Dantology in many of our universities. These chairs are held by regular professors who do nothing else all their livelong days except explain the great Florentine poet or dig up his old laundry bills and his unpaid grocery accounts. I therefore cannot hope to add much that would be new and, while I like warmed-up dishes, I must confess that I am not very fond of any kind of literary rehash.

The man's name, Dante Alighieri, is a curious one. The Germans, with their delightful habit of modestly claiming everybody who has ever amounted to anything (provided they fit into their scheme of a Nordic *Herren-race*), have tried to prove that his name was of Teutonic origin,

and had originally been Aldiger or something like that. Dante himself seems to have been unaware of any Germanic antecedents. Indeed, he confessed that he was almost completely ignorant about his own ancestry. While on his famous visit to the nether regions, he stumbled upon one of his great-great-grandfathers who bore the romantic name of Cacciaguida, or something like that. The particular crime or misdemeanour for which this stout warrior and crusader was roasting in hell I do not remember, but there he was, and he and his descendant had quite a pleasant little chat. But it is perfectly possible that Dante, being a poet rather than a historian, had deliberately invented this distinguished progenitor, just as I in my *Rembrandt* gave life to the good Dr Ioannes van Loon, who has since then been honoured with a special item in the *General German Pharmaceutical Encyclopedia*, although he never existed except in my own brain.

And then there is one other point I want to make right away, so that we do not get things mixed up. Dante did not write his *Inferno* for the purpose of adding to our historical knowledge of the fourteenth century. He wanted to give expression to his private opinion of many of the people with whom he had come in contact during his own political career, and his literary masterpiece was his way of getting even with those of his neighbours who had not quite treated him as he thought he had deserved.

The comedy he bestowed upon us is usually known as the "Divine." It was divine from a literary point of view, for few books have been written with so much venom and so much hatred and such profound desire for vengeance as this immortal opus of the gloomy Florentine.

We know very little about Dante's father except that he had married twice and had several other children, but most of them remained obscure and hazy figures who played no particular rôle in Dante's own life. We have, however, sufficient information about Dante's background to be certain that while he did not belong to the nobility, he was of good family and that his father and his grandfather before him had been men of sound standing in the community, both socially and economically. But when it comes to details about his childhood and the days of his youth, we are again in the dark. His father could afford to give him the best education then available for a commoner and did so. Therefore, the future Columbus of hell was no self-made man within the realm of letters, as has sometimes been claimed. He had learned all that could be learned in a medieval city of the last half of the thirteenth century (he was born in the year 1265), and he was thoroughly familiar with the classics.

The only other incident about this period which has come down to

us was the passion which temporarily deprived him of his senses when he first beheld the countenance of the lovely Beatrice Portinari. In spite of his sentiments towards the young lady, he seems never to have met her socially, which need not surprise us, as both of them were nine years old when they first beheld each other in the streets of their native town.

The memory, however, of this frustrated love affair, which had been nothing much more serious than the sort of affliction which occurs to all of us when we are very young and very innocent, assumed truly gigantic proportions in the mind of this highly introspective author. We therefore meet the lovely Beatrice again and again in all of his writings. She, however, did not influence his subsequent career half as much as his decision to go in for politics.

You will remember enough about the history you learned at school to realize that a political career in the Florence of that day was not possible without belonging to one of the two parties which for almost a century had been fighting for the control of the city. Young Dante therefore was obliged to decide first of all whether he would become a Republican or a Democrat, as we would say to-day.

When Dante was born, all the leading families of Florence were sharply divided into Ghibellines and Guelphs. As I invariably forget who were the Guelphs and who the Ghibellines, I had better look them up once more. Let me see. The Guelphs (it is easy to remember them from their original German name of the Wolfs—a prominent Saxon family) had for a long time fought the Hohenstaufens, their rivals for the imperial German throne. In Italy the latter had become known as the Ghibellines, which was the way the Italians pronounced the name of one of their largest castles, that of Waiblingen. The original struggle between these two houses in Germany had gradually found its way across the Alps, and there it had led to the formation of two political factions who opposed each other as bitterly as the Guelphs and the Hohenstaufens had done in Germany, but upon a different basis. The Guelphs in Italy were those who wanted the Pope to be the leading power in Italy and who had no use for the German emperor as overlord of their country, whereas the Ghibellines favoured the German emperors as the future autocrats of the whole of the Apennine peninsula.

I can perhaps make this explanation a little simpler by saying that the Ghibellines as a rule were the aristocrats, while the Guelphs represented the more democratic element. Not, of course, democratic in our sense of the word, but as representative of that large middle class which, after a thousand years of an almost total eclipse, was at last beginning to regain some of its old influence upon the Government. The rich cities, as need hardly be stressed, were predominantly Guelphic in their

sentiments, while the country squires were of the Ghibelline persuasion. In Florence, a stronghold of commerce and manufacturing, the Guelphs had been driven out of power a short time before Dante was born. The feeling, however, between the two parties had been much too strong to have entirely disappeared, and the city, when Dante entered upon his political career, was divided into the so-called Black Guelphs and White Guelphs, or the Blacks and the Whites—as they were called for short. These Blacks and Whites fought each other very much as modern Republicans and Democrats will fight each other in America.

Dante, who from the age of thirty on had been a member of the Florentine city Government, happened to belong to the faction of the White Guelphs. Therefore, when still another and altogether unexpected local upheaval had brought the Black Guelphs back into power, he and all the leading members of his party were forced to leave the city on pain of being executed if they should ever again dare to set foot on Florentine territory. That meant that six hundred families were suddenly deprived of all their possessions and were cast upon the generosity of the world at large, without a penny to their name. To many of them it meant the end. Others of a tougher fibre settled down in some near-by White city and supported themselves by doing menial jobs or finding employment in one of the sweat-shops which were so characteristic of the Italy of that day. Still others became professional exiles and spent their time plotting for the overthrow of the Government in the old home town, while accepting money from anyone foolish enough to let them have it.

Dante was an exception. He must already have enjoyed a certain reputation as a man of letters, for he never lacked at least sufficient cash to pay for his daily needs. These were exceedingly simple. All the same, even a few dollars a week mean an awful lot to a political refugee, and those few dollars Dante always seems to have had at his disposal. And since he was now without any regular employment, he thought it would be a good idea if first of all he saw a little something more of the world than most of his fellow-Italians had ever bothered to do and learned a few things about his fellow-men.

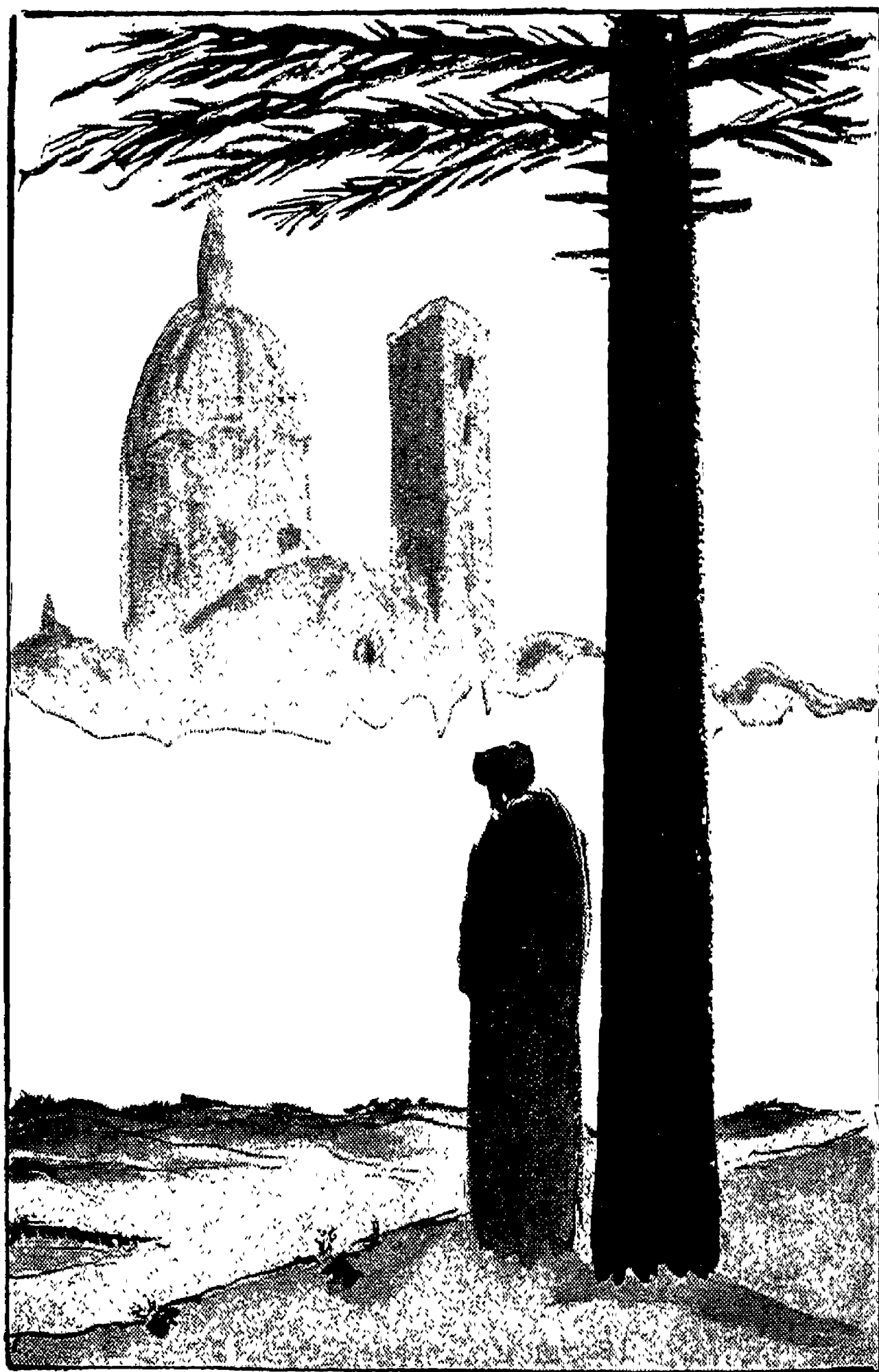
First of all, he proceeded to Milan, where he paid homage to the newly elected emperor of that Holy Roman Empire of Germanic origin which had been founded by Charlemagne in the year 800. From Milan he wandered all over northern Italy. After that, having enjoyed the temporary hospitality of a great number of Italian princes who supported the Ghibelline or imperial cause, he moved to the little city of Ravenna, where he stayed for the rest of his days under the protection of the local dictator, Guido da Polenta. And there he worked on his great poem and there he died on the fourteenth day of September of the year of grace 1321.

Some years before his death Dante had been offered an opportunity to return to his native city of Florence. But in order to be forgiven for having belonged to the wrong political clique, he would have been obliged not only to pay a heavy fine but also to go through an act of public penance in one of the churches. He refused to do this in a letter which has been preserved and which reads very much like the noble document in which Thomas Mann answered the obscene Nazi rector of the University of Bonn, who had deprived him of the honorary degree which a few years before had been bestowed upon this most distinguished German man of letters. It makes us admire Dante and occasionally even like him, for few people have ever felt such a fanatical affection for the city of their birth as this unhappy exile. The image of Florence was with him day and night, but as you and I, my dear Frits, are just as absurd in our devotion to our little Veere (which, God knows, is no Florence), we can well understand his attitude of imperishable loyalty. In our case, no matter where we go, we always hope to return to Veere some day. Whereas Dante knew that his sentence was one for life. But it could not be helped. He could not do otherwise. Honour meant more to him than anything else. He could not possibly confess himself guilty when he felt that he had committed no crime. And so he steadfastly refused to ask for a pardon, even if it meant that never again would he see the low hills of his beloved Tuscany and that never again would he stand by the banks of the swift-flowing Arno on the same spot where he had caught his first glimpse of the beloved Beatrice. Rather than so demean himself, he would spend his days in dignified loneliness among the pine forests of Ravenna and would die unforgiven and unforgiving.

Quite naturally, these bitter years of exile were bound to influence his entire outlook upon life, and they were to account for that spirit of all-pervading gloom which often makes the reading of his works a duty rather than a pleasure. But they also were to give that unmistakable touch of nobility to everything he ever wrote, even if he is a most undependable guide when he introduces us to some of the people whom he cast into the deepest pits of hell.

I think this point should be much more stressed than it usually is. The *Inferno* was Dante's apology for his own life. It was his justification for his political activities while he had still been young and full of zeal to serve his country. One would hardly have expected President Wilson, had he ever had time to write his own version of hell, to have given Senator Lodge a prominent place among the saints.

Dante's *Inferno*, therefore, should be taken with many shovelfuls of salt. It is one of the most biased political treatises ever written, and that is what makes it more and more difficult for modern readers to enjoy



THE EXILE

the book without a great deal of comment. Dante's contemporaries, of course, got every hint and allusion. In a way, he was their 'columnist,' except that he went just a little farther than most of his modern colleagues. He did not merely suggest that some of his enemies should spend the rest of their days burning in hell. He actually took them down there and let them burn.

And now let me talk a little about his book, for in the case of Dante, the book is the thing, and the author is only of secondary importance. He lays the opening scene of his famous opus on the Friday before Easter of the year 1300, although the actual date at which he began to do his writing has never yet been decided upon. Neither do we know when he finished it. As for the rest of his output, the *Vita Nuova*, or *New Life*, his tribute to the unforgettable Beatrice, and his *Convivio*, or *Banquet* (*Table Talk*, as he would have called it to-day), which was a sort of *Book of Knowledge* of the early fourteenth century—all these volumes, while of undoubted merit, never quite enter into the picture. They enjoy about the same rating as the historical plays of Alfred, Lord Tennyson. One would rather do six weeks' hard labour than read one of them.

And now let me see (mostly for my own amusement) whether I can, in as few words as possible, sum up for the defence and state why, in spite of a great many claims to the contrary, it is still possible, after the lapse of so many centuries, to insist that *The Divine Comedy* is good reading and that its author will always remain one of the most important figures of literature.

When I suggested that we invite Dante and Leonardo at the same time, I did so because to me they represent two exceedingly interesting chapters in the history of the human race—the last and final chapter of the Middle Ages and one of the first chapters of the Renaissance, and these are the grounds upon which I shall base my contentions on behalf of Signor Dante.

He was the last of the great medievalists because he was the last man who wrote at a moment when it was still possible for an ordinary human being to be a walking encyclopedia and to know everything that was knowable in his own day and age. As a result, *The Divine Comedy* is not merely a religious poem, like *Paradise Lost*; in addition, it is a commentary upon everything the people of the Middle Ages knew or said or thought or did. Indeed, had we been deprived of all our other medieval sources we would, had we saved but a single copy of Dante, be able to

reconstruct practically the whole of the life of the Middle Ages out of this one volume.

Modern man can no longer hope to do this. Balzac in his *Comédie humaine* showed us the kind of people who lived in France during the first half of the last century. Zola tried to perform a similar service for those of the last half. But Dante surpassed them both. His field of operations was of course a much less complicated one than that of the two Frenchmen I just mentioned. He lived in an age of basic simplicities. Neither time nor distance had as yet been abolished, and God still ruled over heaven and earth as He had done since the beginning of time. Science was practically non-existent, and the arts dealt with rather crude materials, for musical instruments and all the modern methods of reproduction, such as oil paints and etching presses and indelible inks, were not to make their appearance until much later.

In order to move from one spot to another, one still walked. If the voyage was to be taken by sea, one sailed by God and by guess, without any very dependable assurance of ever reaching one's destination. Also, there still was a complete lack of even the most rudimentary forms of comfort. Therefore, the prince and the pauper enjoyed very much the same kind of daily existence. The prince might have a thousand horses at his disposal, but he could use only one at a time and therefore could not move much faster than the peasant who had only one mule, provided the mule felt inclined to take a little trip, in which case he might get there a great deal sooner than the royal or imperial stallion.

But even in those favourable circumstances, it remained a marvellous tour de force to reduce the whole of a civilization and a complete cycle of culture to one single volume and to turn that volume not into a dull encyclopedia but to make it a first-rate work of art full of life and colour.

Shortly after Dante's death the Renaissance, then so proudly compared with a rebirth of civilization, swept over Europe with the violence of an artistic hurricane. In the first proud flush of their victory, the men of the Renaissance looked down upon their immediate predecessors with the same contemptuous disdain with which they contemplated the architectural glories of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, which they dismissed as too utterly Gothic, too hopelessly barbaric and crude, to be of any real interest to their own refined tastes.

Since then we have learned better. To-day most of us prefer the cathedral of Chartres to the church of St Peter's, and we have come to realize that the paper monument which Dante constructed out of the bitterness of his long and undeserved exile towers mightily above all the other creations of medieval man. I know it was not built out of mortar and stone. Paper and ink were the materials the great Florentine used



to erect his mighty edifice. But to these he added one other element of paramount importance—the mysterious quality of the soul known as genius.

And now we come to a very different type of person. For while Dante, as a perfect son of the Middle Ages, 'knew' and had no doubts, Leonardo 'guessed' and never ceased to ask why. In which he was as perfect a representative of the Renaissance mentality as Dante had been of the spirit of that era that had now come to a definite end.

Leonardo was born in 1452. He died in 1519. Let us assume that he needed the first twenty years for his education. That gives him forty-seven years in which to do his life's work. He must have kept very busy when we consider that he was not merely one of the greatest painters of all times but that furthermore he acquired an outstanding reputation as an architect, an engineer, a sculptor, an athlete, a student of physics and ballistics, a poet, a composer, a musician, a philosopher, an inventor, and an expert on military matters.

Now that may seem to be a direct contradiction of what I said a moment ago when I described Dante as the last of the medievalists because he could still gather together all the available knowledge of his time into one single volume. But whereas Dante was the 'summer-upper' of all that had been known in the past, Leonardo was the prophet of everything that had to be revealed by the future. As it is much more difficult to 'predict' than to 'enumerate,' Leonardo was the greater of the two, but comparisons are apt to be very futile when they are comparisons between men who were prominent in such completely different fields of endeavour, so I shall drop the discussion right away.

Leonardo was an illegitimate child. His father was a Florentine lawyer. His mother, about whom we know nothing at all, was probably a native of the village of Vinci, and hence the boy's name. His father must have taken an interest in him, for the son received the education of a young gentleman, and showing a definite inclination towards the arts, he was sent to learn his craft from Andrea del Verrocchio, then still quite a young man but already distinguished as a painter, a sculptor, an engineer, and a silversmith.

With Leonardo I am back again at the highly intriguing subject of genius. We have met quite a number of men and women of outstanding ability these last four months, but I am sorry to confess that I don't know very much more about them than I did before they happened to drop in as our dinner guests. I am, however, beginning to suspect that genius is rather like wine, in that there are certain regions which are apt to raise a much better crop of geniuses than others and that there are definite

years during which the genius harvest in all parts of the world will be much greater than during other years or numbers of years. I dare not, however, be too dogmatic upon this subject, for quite often an otherwise barren part of the world will suddenly give us a most superior vintage, while other valleys which until then had provided us with the finest annual harvests will suddenly and for no apparent reason become as sterile as the central desert of the Australian continent.

Our specialists in the noble art of wine-growing seem to have some idea why there is apt to be such a great discrepancy between the harvest of one year and another. Unfortunately, the human race, unlike the humble grape, has never yet been subjected to that kind of clinical study, and as a result we know much less about it than we do about the product of our vineyards. Since the exceptional individual has mighty little chance to be made the subject of such an investigation in a world which has made the ordinary individual the centre of all his interest, there seems to be little chance of any immediate inquiry into the riddle of genius.

In the meantime and almost in spite of ourselves, we have got hold of a few data, but they only make the problem slightly more complicated. For example, it is easy to understand why a perpetually fertile region, like the valley of the Nile, should have been predestined to become one of the earliest centres of civilization. But why a rocky and barren peninsula like that of Greece should suddenly have risen forth as a beacon of such vast enlightenment that it still illuminates the whole of our cultural landscape remains an unsolved mystery, for there are a great many other rocky peninsulas in this world, and none of them have contributed a pennyworth to the sum-total of human progress.

Or let us take another example. Why should the flat meadows of the Low Countries have set an all-high standard for painting, while other flat countries like Denmark never attained anything much higher than pictorial mediocrity? I have no idea. And how about music? Imperial Vienna was undoubtedly a city suffering so severely from every kind of censorship that the available local energy had to find some other kind of outlet than by means of the forbidden politics. In such a case, music has always been an ideal means of escape. But why Vienna should have suddenly burst forth with a Gluck, a Haydn, a Mozart, a Beethoven, a Schubert, a Strauss, and all the others at the moment it did—that again is still a profound mystery. Other nations ruled over by the Habsburgs were repressed with equal brutality, but their musical output did not noticeably increase. Whenever I discuss this subject (a couple of times a day), I am told that the solution to the Viennese puzzle lies in the fact that the people of Vienna were a hodgepodge of all kinds of races and that such mixtures are invariably productive of great musical talent.

Very well, I answer, but if that is true, then why have our own cities with a hundred races so far failed to give us a single first-class composer?

Even more incomprehensible is the problem of why such artistic and spiritual flare-ups, once they have come to an end, can never be rekindled, no matter how hard anyone blows the bellows of local enthusiasm. The recent traveller in modern Italy or Greece will remember (and with a considerable amount of horror) the architectural monstrosities of which these countries have been guilty during the last hundred years. The land of Michelangelo and Bramante has gone Bleecker Street and loves it. The pilgrim to the unknown grave of Mozart will still hear music in Vienna, but it is of the imported variety, for Vienna's native musical genius came to an end with Johann Strauss. Brahms was a foreign import (Hamburg was almost as far removed from Vienna as New York, when Johannes was born), and so were Mahler and Bruckner, and all efforts to revive the city on the muddy Danube as a true centre of music have failed as lamentably as the attempt to make Bruges once more a city of commerce by digging a canal that connects it with the North Sea.

There are many more such examples. Holland still paints, but the Rembrandts and the Vermeers are gone, and in the land of Goethe and Heinrich Heine, people to-day read *Mein Kampf*.

I mention all this merely because the subject fascinates me. I do not expect or even hope to find an answer, but this sort of thinking aloud is a pastime in which all of us should occasionally indulge.

And now back to the Italy of the late Middle Ages and the early Renaissance. The crop of genius which the Italian peninsula raised during the years that lay between the death of Dante and the birth of Leonardo was well-nigh incredible, and it was genius of a very particular sort, genius of the universal type, which is as rare as a good meal in an English country hotel.

That was the blessed era when some obscure professor in Bologna or Padua or Salerno might teach half a dozen different subjects and teach all of them well. That was the age when great painters were employed as ambassadors and made a success of the job, when writers could hold high political office, and when rulers of nations and cities would try their hand at writing, at music, at drawing, and when even a Pope was not held in disesteem because he happened to know the difference between a good picture and a bad one.

Furthermore, it was a paradise in which almost any boy with talent had a chance to find some kind of outlet for his artistic aspirations. For although there was a complete lack of those musical and artistic academies which dot the modern landscape, the quest for men of talent was so

widespread and so eagerly pursued that it resembled our own search after promising baseball or football material. Let it be rumoured about that there was a budding painter or sculptor in some distant *villaggio* in Tuscany or Umbria, and the art scouts would go after him with the same eagerness with which to-day they would follow up a clue about a brilliant short-stop or half-back said to be playing in some bush league in Texas or Jersey.

Even social background, that bugaboo of medieval life, counted for nothing. Legitimacy was, of course, preferred, but illegitimacy was by no means a deterrent. It all came down to Schubert's happy phrase, "*Kann er was?*" or "Does the fellow know anything?" If he did—if he really knew something—he was welcome. Otherwise let him stay where he was and stick to his sheep or his pots and pans or double-entry book-keeping.

The Renaissance was by no means the last word upon the subject of human perfection. Far from it! The people of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries remained as indifferent about science as those of the Middle Ages had been. They took no interest in those social problems which so seriously occupy us to-day that there is very little room left for anything else. They continued to live quite serenely in a world which stank in the most literal sense of the word. And being indifferent about even the most primitive kind of personal hygiene, those Renaissance ladies and gentlemen in their beautiful silks and satins tolerated a death-rate which makes us shudder when we think of that utterly unnecessary loss of life. But those good people, so far behind us in many things which we consider all-important, were far ahead of us in certain other respects to which we ourselves pay but scant attention.

During the Middle Ages religion had been an integral part of everybody's daily existence. The Church had supervised and regulated everything they did or thought from early morning until the moment it was time to go to bed. Now religion was gradually beginning to lose the hold it had had upon people's imagination, and the arts were taking its place, and after having turned their backs upon the world of the senses for almost ten full centuries, the men and women of the new Europe arose from their long and beautiful dream about the blessings of the life hereafter to discover that existence here on this planet could also be a most delightful experience. Being still possessed of that sense of wonder which had been so characteristic of the childlike folk who had preceded them, they took to their new toys with whoops of joy and made them as much part of their daily existence as their crucifixes and rosaries had been until only a few years before.

The Florentine and Milanese and Venetian and Paduan and Sienese contemporaries of Leonardo did not go to the theatre because the piece

that was being given that evening happened to be the rage of the town and because not having seen it would expose them to the superior smiles of their neighbours. They did not storm a church the moment a new painting had been unveiled because to have remained at home might have made them lose on the conversation the next time they were invited to dinner by their boss. They did not eagerly await the completion of a new opera because going to the opera was the fashionable thing to do; nor did they invite artists to their parties because the presence of those exotic guests would assure them of being mentioned in next Sunday's society columns. A few may have done so, but a much greater number of people than ever before (not even excepting the ancient Greeks) took an active part in all these manifestations of the artistic spirit because they were truly interested and understood what was being done. They knew the output of all their leading maestros by heart in the same way that a citizen of a modern American city will be familiar with the box scores of his favourite players, and they could judge their works on points with the same feeling for technical perfection you will encounter among a group of professional coaches going to attend the annual battle between the Texas Christians and the Southern Methodists.

I seem to be unable to avoid these comparisons borrowed from the field of sport. But that cannot very well be helped, for sport in our own age has taken the place of religion during the Middle Ages, a love for the arts during the Renaissance, a passion for discovery during the sixteenth century, and a love of humanity during the prologue to the French Revolution.

But let me get back to my facts, for I am sure I have now given you enough of a background picture to make you understand why a career such as that of Leonardo was not only possible during the latter half of the fifteenth century but was accepted as something quite normal.

In the year 1472, at the age of twenty, Leonardo was deemed sufficiently well versed in his craft to be allowed to join the painters' guild of Florence. Like all other apprentices of that era, he had often substituted for his teacher, but even in those earliest works of his, we come across evidences of that disastrous habit which would cling to him all through life—the habit of never quite finishing a job. It is easy enough to guess at the cause. Leonardo was primarily an experimenter. He was driven by an insatiable curiosity and a furious desire to find out what made the wheels go round. Nothing else mattered. As soon as he felt that he was on the right track to another discovery, he lost interest in the old problem and turned to something new, and being a true son of the Renaissance in his belief that, being human, he had at his disposal the whole realm of human

endeavour, he did not merely dabble in paints and clays but boldly carried his researches into every field of the arts and the sciences.

We usually think of Leonardo as an old man with a generous crop of whiskers, for his self-portrait (in red chalk), which is the best-known one, shows him that way. When he was young, he must have looked quite different. All his biographers agree that he owed much of his initial success in life to his good looks, to the charm of his manners, and to the easy grace of behaviour which made it possible for him to meet every one, from queen to chambermaid, on the ground of a common understanding and appreciation.

Here again I could draw a rather interesting analogy between the sixteenth century and our own. To-day the artist, if he wants to pay his rent and to provide an occasional delicacy for his models, must appeal primarily to the women among his prospective customers. And since there are no longer any definite standards of taste (the last of the world-wide cultural patterns having disappeared when the rococo came to an end a hundred and fifty years ago), it is very easy for these modern patrons of the arts to insist that they must be right in their preferences because, while they may not know what is good, they know what they like, a remark which provoked Monet's famous reply, "Yes, madam, just like the cows."

Unfortunately, quite often they don't even really know what they like and they will hire a painter or a composer as they would hire a plumber, by sending for some one who is well recommended but about whose abilities they have no personal or first-hand information. In the case of the plumber they must, of course, practise a certain measure of caution, because a flooded cellar is a terrible nuisance. But a third-rate portrait can always be helped out by giving it the right kind of lighting or a very expensive frame or a fine write-up in the local newspapers. Since most of the admiring guests will be quite as ignorant upon the subject of good portraiture as their hostess, there is little chance that the true value of this wasted piece of canvas will be discovered, at least during the lifetime of the subject.

In Leonardo's day the men and not the women did the ordering, and therefore the artist was saved the degradation of having to go in for the social life of the community for no other purpose than to establish the right kinds of connexions. He probably was just as fond of a free meal as his descendants of to-day, but he did not have to mix his sales-talk with his liquor at a ladies' cocktail party.

In the case of Leonardo, this was all the more fortunate, for he was apparently not interested (or only very moderately so) in the feminine

half of the world. He spent most of his life among men, only occasionally painting their wives or using women as models for his Madonnas, but in spite of this they appreciated him sufficiently to keep him employed until the last day he spent on earth. To-day, I am afraid, he would have found it very difficult to make a living. Whereas, having been born in the fifteenth century, he died a fairly rich man, and he would have died a very rich man if his royal and princely customers had been a little more regular in the payment of their debts, and if he himself had not wasted so large a part of his income on his everlasting experiments, from submarines to flying-machines.

But let me get back to those facts so dearly beloved of all historians and a matter of such complete indifference to most artists. Here is his schedule between the years 1472, when he became a master painter in Florence, and 1519, when he died near Amboise, a small town not far from Paris.

In 1483 Lorenzo de' Medici, the ruler of Florence who not only loved art but (infinitely more important) *knew* it too, sent him as his special representative to Lodovico Sforza, better known as Lodovico il Moro, or Louis the Blackamoor, who at that moment happened to be the political boss of Milan. The purpose of this mission was the gaining of the Moro's good will. Leonardo succeeded so well in making himself popular that, when the time came for him to go back to Florence, the Milanese dictator kept him at his own court for most of the next sixteen years.

During this period Leonardo started a few pictures that were finished, but a great many more, like his famous *Last Supper*, remained for ever in the experimental stage. The rest of his time he worked on the cathedral of Milan, superintended the renovation of the Duke's castle, and drew up the plans for the irrigation of the plains of Lombardy and the digging of the Maremma canal. In his spare hours, he also arranged Il Moro's world-famous pageants, wrote the masques and fables that were given at these parties, and for good measure composed most of the music which was an inevitable part of such mummeries.

Also—I almost forgot—he laid out the plans for the fortifications of the city, finished a treatise on painting, and prepared to enrich Milan with a colossal equestrian statue of Francesco Sforza that was to be twenty-six feet high. This statue, I regret to say, was never finished. The original model was destroyed by some playful soldiers, who, being temporarily in control of the town, used it as a mark for their target practice.

In addition to these trifles, Leonardo also found time to continue his studies of human anatomy, to observe the flight of the birds, to construct

a flying-machine (which would have flown if he had had some kind of motor), to draw up the plans for a new seat of the municipal government, to collect groups of drunken old crones that he might observe their physiognomies while they were in their cups, to deliver lectures on art in the market-place, to show the gilded youth of Milan how one should ride a horse and take a hurdle, to study mathematics with Toscanelli (whose map of the world was used by Columbus during his first voyage across the ocean), to play the lute and write music for this exceedingly complicated instrument, and to act as consulting architect and engineer for those of the near-by political bosses who were on sufficiently friendly terms with Il Moro to borrow his 'man-of-all-work' whenever they were planning to do a little fortifying or irrigating of their own.

One of the most famous of these so-called 'intervals' when Leonardo was not kept busy at the court of Milan occurred in the year 1502, when Cesare Borgia sent for him to help him solve several big engineering projects in central Italy. One would suppose that, being buried up to his neck in blueprints, Leonardo just then would not have had time for anything else, but it was during the next year—1503—that he began that portrait of the wife of Zanobi del Giocondo, the lady with the mysterious smile who has been familiar to everybody these last four hundred years under the name of *La Gioconda*, or the *Mona Lisa*.

Finally, Leonardo found himself so flooded with orders for all sorts of things, that he was obliged to maintain two fully equipped studios, one in Florence and one in Milan, and to these he afterwards added still another one in Rome, where his old protectors, the Medici, now occupied the Holy See.

In this way, working and experimenting all the hours of both day and night, he had attained the age of more than sixty at a time when the average expectancy of life was less than forty. Being endowed with an indestructible constitution, Leonardo still enjoyed the best of health, but a new generation had grown up, and younger men like Michelangelo and Raphael were beginning to take the place he had held until then. He wisely decided that the time had come to retire. Painting and music no longer interested him as much as they used to. He was beginning to become more and more engrossed in his scientific studies. Therefore, when King Francis I of France offered him a quiet position at his own court, where he would be able to do exactly as he pleased, he gratefully accepted. It was just what he wanted to round off his life with dignity.

Francis was as good as his word and, being young and ambitious, he felt that the acquisition of an artist of Leonardo's fame was the greatest achievement of his life. He gave orders that the entire castle of Cloux, near Amboise, be placed at the master's disposal and earmarked sufficient



funds in the royal treasury to pay his greatly honoured guest his promised income.

Leonardo bade a leisurely farewell to his native Italy, and together with his retinue of apprentices and workers in clay and iron and his secretaries and his draughtsmen and his servants, he moved into his new quarters. Now at last, so he hoped, he would have the opportunity to put some order into those barrels and boxes of notes and scientific observations he had accumulated during the previous forty years and which had been written down in a cipher that no one but the old master himself understood.

But it was too late. He was rapidly losing his strength. Frequent references to his 'left-handedness' make us suspect that he had either suffered a slight stroke or had got writer's cramp, that strange malady of the nerves which is so apt to attack musicians, telegraphers, and writers and which, when it affects the legs, has put an end to many a dancer's career. Even to-day there is no cure for this ailment. The only thing one can do is to learn to write or draw or play with the hand that has remained normal. Judging by the drawings of this later period, that is apparently what Leonardo was obliged to do. He had to become an artistic left-hander.

In the spring of the year 1519, after two and a half years in the employ of the King of France, Leonardo felt that he would not have much longer to live. His mind was still as active as ever. In the spring of the previous year he had arranged for all the festivities in connexion with the christening of the heir to the throne. In the autumn he had been responsible for the entertainment in honour of the marriage of a Bourbon prince to a princess of the House of Medici. In addition to these activities, he had started elaborate plans for the construction of a canal that was to connect the Loire and the Saône rivers. His pupils were doing their best to relieve the master of all unnecessary details that he might devote himself entirely to the main issues. But when a man has lived the lives of a dozen ordinary mortals, he must expect that sooner or later the engine will show signs of wear and tear and that nothing can be done to restore it to its old efficiency.

On the eve of Easter of the year 1519 Leonardo made his last will and testament, giving evidence of that kindness and generosity of heart which had been so characteristic of him that it had become proverbial. With full premonition of his coming end but without any fear of death, he quietly went to sleep one beautiful evening in the month of May of the year 1519 and never woke up.

"As a day well spent gives joyful sleep, so does a life well spent give joyful death."

I should, of course, have thought of it, but somehow it had slipped my mind and it therefore came to me with quite a shock a few minutes before seven on Saturday night, when I was unexpectedly reminded that we should have prepared for an extra guest. I was on my way to Frits' house. I had as usual been working at my *Rembrandt* since early morning, and I took the long way round while going to the market-place, and this led me to the neighbourhood of the road to Middelburg, and there I suddenly beheld a strange procession.

Signor Dante, with stately steps, was approaching the good city of Veere. But he was not alone. As I should have anticipated (if I had been just a little brighter) he was accompanied by that faithful guide who had conducted him on his voyage through the nether regions. Immediately behind him there walked a creature that looked like a hog and which carried some kind of monster on its back. How stupid that I should have forgotten about Virgil until I actually saw him. Fortunately, there still was plenty of time to rearrange the seats at our table. I ran back home, grabbed my bicycle (which, like a cowboy's horse, was always waiting for the good people of Veere in front of their houses), and a few minutes later Jo had been given the necessary instructions, and three cups of water had been added to the soup.

That was the first of our adventures on this strange evening, and there were to be several others.

Immediately after the last war Veere had for a short time been a station of the Dutch flying corps. Being situated on the Scheldt, it was an ideal spot for seaplanes. But war departments are fickle institutions, and no sooner had the necessary docks and hangars been finished than all the plans had been changed and the fliers had been removed to another part of the country. But once in a while, when the navy held its annual manœuvres near Flushing, a few dozen hydroplanes still came to our town. We were expecting them within a few days, as the autumn manœuvres would be held by the beginning of the next week. A young Dutch flier whom we had met through Charles Kingsford-Smith (Charles used to spend practically all his spare time with us while preparing for his flight to America) had arrived a few days before to make the necessary arrangements for the ground crews and the repair men. And as luck or ill-luck would have it, he knocked at our door on this evening of all evenings and only a few minutes before our guests were supposed to make their appearance.

When he noticed that we were expecting company, he politely excused himself and said that he must leave immediately, but apparently there was something on his mind which he felt that he must tell us, and right away, too.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said. "I am terribly sorry and, anyway, I can stay only a moment, but I wish you would step out here for just a second and tell me whether I am drunk or something. Just come out here for a second, please, and look at that up there—that spot in the sky. It's the damndest thing I have ever seen in the air. I have been following it for the last hour and a half but I haven't the slightest idea yet whether it is a glider or a plane or something a kid got for his birthday and that flew away on him. There it goes again! Right there over the mill in front of that dark cloud."

Frits and Hein and I followed his finger and saw that he was right. About a thousand feet or so above us, something resembling a huge bird (but much larger than any birds ever seen in Holland) was rapidly soaring through the air. It made no noise. It apparently had no motor, and the pilot was hanging below the contraption, strapped apparently to the wings and with his feet fastened to the tail.

"I ask you," said the young Dutch officer, even more excited than before, "I ask you, what in God's name is it? Is it something new the Heinies have just invented? They are said to be making all sorts of queer experiments with gliders. If it is one of their new gliders I suppose I ought to go up and find out and shoot at it till it goes back home. For that fellow up there has been looking us over for the last hour and a half and in that time he must have been able to photograph every fort in Zeeland. But wait! Wait! Look at him now! S'help me God, he is going to come down! I had better run and see what he is up to, for he may break his neck. Mind if I use your bicycle? I'll bring it back in the morning."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I answered.

"Why not? What do you want me to do? Take it lying down? Listen, we can't let the Heinies get away with that sort of thing! They should at least realize that we are on the lookout and know what they're up to!"

I took him by the arm and pushed him into the house.

"Take off your spurs," I told him. "You're going to have dinner with us to-night and then you'll find out all about that mysterious flier."

"Then you know who he is? You might tell me, for if I don't do anything about it, I'll get in an awful lot of trouble with the people at The Hague."

I bade him be seated and have a sherry. Then I asked him, "Ever hear of a certain Leonardo da Vinci?"

"You mean that crazy Italian who lived a thousand years ago and who thought that he could fly?"

"Well, perhaps not a thousand years ago. Make it half that time and



SIGNOR DANTE AND HIS RETINUE WERE SLOWLY WALKING  
TOWARDS VEERE

even a little less. But you are right when you say that he was an Italian and tried to fly."

"That's all very lovely and interesting, but what in heaven's name has it got to do with the Nazi bastard up there who is spying on our forts just now?"

"That's where you are wrong. That isn't a Nazi bastard. That was the old Italian—himself and in person."

"Impossible!"

"In Veere, everything is possible."

"I thought you never touched the stuff! When did you take up drinking?"

"I am as sober as I have been these last fifty years, but if you will sit still for just a moment, I'll tell you something—only promise me that you will never say a word about what you are going to see here to-night."

"Good God! Are you working for the Germans too, and do you want to bribe me to keep my mouth shut by a glass of sherry and a slice of roast beef?"

"Don't be silly," I told him. "We hoped that no one would ever get on to what we have been doing these last four months. You happen to have stumbled on our little secret. We now make you our partner in crime. I have only a few minutes but here is the story," and I told him about our mysterious dinners.

The young Dutchman absolutely refused to believe me. "The trouble with you," he said, "is that you have been working too hard. You have read too many books. You have gone crazy."

"Remember this is Veere."

"Sure, I know, and I also know that one can get away with a hell of a lot of things in this funny little village. But when you tell me that I am about to have dinner with an Italian who has been dead and buried for the last five hundred years—I tell you, you are cuckoo and I am going home and tell your wife to call for you and bring the doctor. Good-night to you all, but I am off!"

And he would have gone too, except that just as he opened the door, he found himself face to face with Leonardo, who in French but with a strong Italian accent asked him whether this was the house where he was expected for dinner that evening. Completely taken aback by this strange meeting, the poor Dutch boy had not the slightest idea what to do. So he clicked his heels in his best military style, gave the new arrival a salute which made me fear that all the buttons of his uniform would snap off, and in his awkward schoolbook French he barked back, "*Oui, monsieur, C'est la maison.*"

"*Alors, on peut entrer,*" Leonardo continued, "and I shall be very glad



IT WAS LEONARDO, COMING DOWN IN HIS GLIDER

to sit down for a little while. I had not handled my little machine for so many centuries—*on perd l'habitude*—and my back hurts as if I had been painting murals for a couple of months.”

I assured him in my not too elegant Italian that a most comfortable chair was awaiting his pleasure then and there and he was obliging enough to pretend that he understood me and with a sigh of relief he settled down in Erasmus' chair, stretched his legs, showing us the rich rose-coloured robe he wore underneath his flying-coat, and by clicking his tongue against his palate in the true Italian manner, he gave expression to his feelings of complete satisfaction.

My Dutch friend had followed all this with eyes that almost popped out of his head. At last he found his voice. “This,” he whispered to me, “is surely the damndest thing that has ever happened to me. Tell me once more—is that really old Leonardo?”

“It is.”

“O.K. Then I will stay. This is going to be fun!”

“And how!” I answered; “but let me warn you that before the evening is over, the old fellow will have asked you more questions than any living being can hope to answer, and he may know more about flying than you can ever hope to do.”

“I don't mind. I've had ten years of flying every kind of crate. I'll hold my own. And now, will you please present me?” For, like all good Dutchmen, he felt that one could not possibly address a stranger without first having been properly introduced.

I asked Leonardo to be allowed to let our friend make his acquaintance. “*E aviatore*,” I added.

“*Ecco! un aviatore olandese! Benissimo, benissimo! Parla francese?*”

I assured him that he spoke French quite nicely and then I took our flier by the hand, put him next to our Italian guest, and said to him in Dutch, “Now go to it and show him that you know something.”

“Won't I though?” and being a pleasant and cheerful young man, he went after his unexpected task with all the eagerness that fliers otherwise reserve for a first assault upon an exceptionally pretty pair of ankles.

Leonardo therefore was off our hands, for after a few agreeable words with Erasmus, who meanwhile had come in by way of the kitchen, he was completely lost in a preliminary bout with the young Dutchman and, as far as I could make out, he was asking him what he thought of the possibility of ever making any extensive flights with gliders. The Dutchman was just about to answer that he thought mighty little of the whole subject of gliders when our two other guests arrived. They did not, however, come in right away. There seemed to be some kind of trouble. It was Virgil who did the explaining and Erasmus who did the translating.

"They don't seem to know quite what to do with their—shall I call them 'companions'?" he explained, and he pointed to the pig-like monster I had noticed on the Middelburg road with a little black devil riding on his back.

"What do they want to do with them?" I asked. "They don't want them to come in, I hope."

"No," Erasmus answered, "but they have had a long walk and are tired out. They are wondering whether we could give those creatures something to eat."

"Of course," I said, "just let them tell us what they want. Meat or vegetables or stale bread or milk—or whatever they want."

Erasmus relayed this message to Virgil. Then he turned to Jo, who had joined us to ask what she could get these strange visitors, and said, "I am afraid that none of those would do. Milk and bread are too mild for them, but if you have a few hot coals for them from your kitchen stove and perhaps a little carbolic acid to quench their thirst, that would just about suit them."

"Nothing easier," said our ever-cheerful Jo, and a moment later she returned with a pailful of hot coals from the kitchen stove and a china bowl full of undiluted carbolic acid which we had bought once upon a time to disinfect an old cesspool in the garden.

Virgil expressed his profound gratitude and said, "Those will be wonderful. The poor things—they are completely exhausted," and a moment later a contented series of grunts and squeaks showed us that Dante's humble companions were enjoying their meal.

Then at last we could introduce everybody to everybody else, and at the same time Hein started the gramophone, but he must have made a mistake, for instead of giving us Jacopo Peri, whom I had chosen for our first number, he started with a Mozart record, *Martern aller Arten* from *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*, sung by Ria Ginster. I was about to go upstairs and correct this error when I caught sight of Leonardo. He seemed so enraptured by the melody that for a moment he had forgotten all about his aviator. Then he looked at Dante, and Dante, for the first time that evening, indulged in a slight movement of the lips which in a normal person would have been called a smile, and both of them were evidently delighted with what they were hearing.

"What was it?" Leonardo asked when the music stopped. I told him. "And who was this Mozart? An Italian?"

"Alas, no. He was merely an Austrian."

"He deserved to have been an Italian," Dante said. "I never heard so lovely a song."



"Neither have I," Leonardo added. "Have you any more of this master's work?"

I assured him that we had enough of Mozart's works to keep him happy for the rest of the evening, but I added that it was about time for dinner.

"Why not combine the two?" Leonardo asked. "We will enjoy our meal all the more if our souls are at peace, listening to these charming melodies. *Che dice il Signor Dante?*"

Il Signor Dante answered that the Signor Leonardo was entirely right. Virgil, too, by way of Erasmus, informed us that he would be delighted, and as for the Dutch flier, we did not bother about him because we knew that he would prefer any kind of American jazz to all the assembled works of Mozart, Beethoven, and Bach. And so we ate our dinner (a meal which, incidentally, greatly pleased our guests) without exchanging more than perhaps a dozen words. But it did not matter, for our guests were having the time of their lives. They listened like men who had been starved for good music during so many years that they were absorbing it like a sun-baked garden which is being drenched by a torrential downpour. Even the Dutch flier seemed slightly impressed.

"Perhaps I never heard enough of that sort of music," he offered by way of apology for nothing in particular. "And I love to look at the faces of those two old men. My! How they are enjoying themselves!"

Music makes for well-regulated meals. At exactly nine o'clock Virgil had consumed the last of the olives, and Dante had absent-mindedly drunk the last drops of our Chianti, and Leonardo had asked a dozen questions about that strange beverage called coffee which Jo had served out of force of habit and which had delighted him as much as it had Dante.

It was time to rise from the table, and after Erasmus had spoken a short prayer of thanksgiving, followed by an amen on the part of Leonardo and Dante, we moved across the room to the fireplace, and there we made ourselves as comfortable as possible, for outside the first snow was falling, and the house was getting rather chilly. Erasmus, as usual, indulged in his forty winks. He woke up when the aviator dropped the poker with which he had been demonstrating some problem connected with the proper balancing of a modern bomber and, in order to show us that he had not really been asleep ("I merely rested my eyes for a few moments," his usual excuse), he asked Virgil whether he had been doing any writing lately. Virgil said no, he had not done anything really worth while for almost two thousand years. But he now felt like changing some of his *Eclogues* after the rich farms he had seen that afternoon on both sides of the road he and Dante had followed from Middelburg. When Erasmus,

thereby flattered by this allusion to Zeeland's richness, returned the compliment by an off-hand recital of whole pages from the *Eclogues*, the Latin poet's joy knew no bounds.

"What a delight!" he said, "and what a surprise! After all these many hundreds of years, I am still being remembered? I had never dared to hope for so much fame. When I was told to guide our noble Florentine friend through hell, I felt that I had reached the height of my career. But to discover that you, my most honoured pupil, are able to speak my verses and in such pure Latin and after all these many, many years—it is incredible, and I am grateful indeed!"

That, however, was a mere side play, for Leonardo was the star performer of the evening. Having squeezed the Dutch flier so completely dry upon the subject of aeronautics that the poor fellow gasped for air and drank more whiskies and soda than were good for him, he tackled Frits upon the subject of our polders. He wanted to know, first of all, how we had dried the land, next how we kept the water inside the polders at just the right level, how we drained our meadows, how many head of cattle we could feed on how small a piece of land, how we managed our locks, and whether the farms belonged to those who worked them, and whether we had the same problem of absentee landlordism which had caused him so much trouble when he was trying to irrigate the plains of Lombardy.

From there Leonardo switched over to music, and it was then that I asked him whether he would be interested in examining a lute which, some twenty years before, I had ordered to be made in Munich, a rather complicated affair with four extra strings—four so-called *Brummer*. He said that he would be delighted, and I went upstairs to get it. I had long since given up trying to learn it seriously. I had found the lute so much more difficult than the violin, especially for the right hand, that it used up all the time I needed for my fiddle, and my fiddling too was rapidly going to pieces, now that I had begun to write those big books to which I owed the fact that I could live in our beloved Veere. I still knew enough about the lute to be able to keep the instrument in tune, and when Leonardo got his hands on it, he found it in perfect working order. He was as pleased as a pianist who, after a long trip in the hinterland, once more puts his feet on the pedals of a Steinway Grand.

"A beautiful piece of craftsmanship," he said, looking tenderly at the long, slender neck. "But tell me, how do you tune these four extra strings?"

I explained that they were supposed to be tuned according to the principal chords you intended to use and showed him how it was done.

"You play too?" he asked.

I told him that I had tried to learn it but that I had found it impossible

to be faithful to both the lute and to the violin. He answered that he agreed and that the lute, if one wanted to play it well, took all one's time. Then he asked me whether I had one of my violins in the house, and I said, "Yes, my second-best one." I kept my Santo Serafino at home, where it was much drier than at Frits' place, which was inhabited only two days a week.

"Get your violin, will you?" Leonardo begged me and, after he had carefully inspected it, he asked me to tune it to his lute.

"And now we will play," he said. "We will play something in the old Italian style and we shall play to honour the greatest of our Italian poets. We will play something slow and stately and in keeping with Signor Dante's incomparable style."

Then followed one of those delightful sessions which make people who are not familiar with music gasp with wonderment, though it is really extremely simple, if you happen to have been born with the gift. Leonardo and I began to improvise. We felt our way about for a moment, then sort of got the 'feel' of each other, united on a comfortable key, and off we were.

We kept at it for more than an hour.

I do not remember what we played. Ideas came and ideas went, and sometimes the lute took the lead and sometimes the fiddle, but these changes were achieved by a sort of silent instinctive consent, and as soon as one of the members of our audience asked us, "Now give us something French," or "Play that tune the way the old Flemings would have done it," or "Let us have that in the Spanish manner," we did as they bade us do as automatically and easily as well-trained horses going from a trot into a gallop.

To spend an evening doing that sort of thing when we could have talked to the author of *The Divine Comedy* may seem a complete waste of time, but if the author of the greatest poem ever written in any language is tongue-tied and refuses to utter more than a few words every fifteen minutes or so, there is little you can do about it. Apparently the poor exile had been for so long a time accustomed to keep his ideas to himself that he had lost the habit of thinking out loud. Whereas Leonardo, dwelling most of his life in the companionship of one of the princes for whom he worked or spending his days in a studio filled with young and enthusiastic apprentices, was completely at his ease in any kind of company. And being an artist rather than a writer, his emotions could find expression by means of his fingers. Unlike Dante, he was not merely a teller of tales who must write down combinations of words to communicate his ideas to his fellow-men. Accustomed to recreate the world by means of a lump of clay or a brush or the entrails of a sheep transformed into

a string, he was able to convey an almost endless variety of nuances, shades, accents, and intonations to his audience by everything he said. This, by the way, is a quality I have detected in a great many other painters and sculptors and musicians, who are apt to be much better conversationalists than their colleagues of the goose quill.

The manner of our parting was the usual one. But to our surprise, the young flier excused himself immediately after our guests had disappeared. We urged him to stay for at least one more whisky and soda, but he said no—he was very busy with a number of reports and had to send a call through to the navy department in The Hague. We knew that as it was Saturday, every official of the navy department had left the office hours before. He therefore must have something else on his mind, and as it could not be a girl (Veere was not that kind of village), we were at a loss to account for his haste in bidding us farewell. But after all, he was free, white, and twenty-one, and it was none of our business.

As soon as he had closed the door behind him, Frits found the solution.

"I'll bet you ten guilders to one," he said, "old Leonardo talked him into giving him a ride in his aeroplane. It is dark, and nobody will be any the wiser."

"I'll take you on. We will ask him to-morrow, for I told him to come for breakfast. Good-night and thanks for a most delightful evening. Good-night, Jo-o-o-o! Good-night, Hein!"

From the kitchen came a cheerful good-night—and the remark that one of those two Italians must have been very handsome when he was young.

I stepped out into the dark, for there was supposed to be a full moon, and when the calendar said "full moon," Veere's six street lanterns were not lighted—a matter of economy. The snow was beginning to melt, and it was very slippery. I had to walk carefully. Just before I reached our own house I stopped, struck by a strange noise.

A moment later I knew that I had lost my guilder. High up in the air, a flying-machine was gaily looping the loop.

## CHAPTER XVII

### How We Entertained MONSIEUR MONTAIGNE and DOCTOR RABELAIS and How Their Visit Almost Led to a Public Riot in Our Peaceful Village of Veere

JIMMIE was right—something was always happening in Veere. Frits had just returned from a short trip to Paris, and a friend of his in The Hague who was going to the Indies had wished a minipiano on him. As Frits did not play a note, it was of no particular use to him, but as a piece of furniture it was entirely inoffensive, and he therefore had had no good reason to say no. And, as he sagely observed, “A piano is like a Sanskrit dictionary. It may seem rather useless at first, but you never can tell when it may come in handy.”

Little Mini was therefore placed right underneath the staircase, and a tuner was ordered to come from Middelburg and put the instrument in order, for untuned pianos are as annoying as clocks that are not going.

As for the visit to Paris in connexion with some loan his firm happened to be floating just then, while it had been a success from a financial point of view (the boom, remember, was in full swing, and the public would buy anything), the trip had been an eye-opener to Frits, and he came back with anxious forebodings about the future of France.

“I never saw anything like it,” he told us. “I know this will hurt Lucie’s feelings, for she loves the French in spite of everything, but it is really terrible.”

“What is terrible?” Lucie asked, who, as on every other Sunday, was having a late breakfast with us. Nine o’clock was very late for breakfast in Veere.

“Everything,” Frits answered.

“But ‘everything’ is so vague,” Lucie protested. “Give me a few examples.”

“Very well, then, here are some of the details. In England they are merely asleep. They never had much imagination, the British, but the crew that is in charge at the moment is hopeless. They seem to notice nothing of what is happening in Germany. When some of us warn them that in another couple of years this fellow Hitler will be able to lick the whole world, they smile pleasantly and say, ‘Let him get strong. He’ll use his army to destroy the Bolshies, and that is exactly what we want.’ And when you ask them what they think he is building all his submarines

for and all his tanks and machine-guns, they suddenly get up on a very high horse and tell you, 'My dear sir, the Germans have not yet forgotten what happened to their naval ambitions during the last war. They will never repeat that mistake.' That this fellow Hitler also has the strongest army the world has ever seen is a matter of complete indifference to them.

"And then we are off. I ask them to remember that during the Great War they had the American fleet on their side, but that only makes them mad, and they have their answer ready. 'But of course the Americans will again fight with us.' No use telling them that this time the Americans might refuse to be as obliging as they were in 1917, and that the American people have grown sick and tired of being called Uncle Shylock, and that it will be much more difficult to get them into the next war.

"But in France—God help us! In France they are not only fast asleep when it comes to the present situation, but the whole country is rotten through and through. Everybody is thinking only of himself. Every man and every woman has his or her price. You can buy Ministers, and if necessary you can buy their wives. To get this loan of ours started—why, in England we could have done it for the price of a couple of ads in two or three of the big newspapers. But in France we had to grease everybody's palm, from the Minister of Finance down to the fellow in a cocked hat who stands in front of the Banque de France."

"That was a nice thing to do," said Lucie, who was going to love the French in spite of everything. "An honest, pure-hearted little Dutchman bribing French officials."

"Don't be foolish," Frits told her. "It did not bother my conscience in the least little bit. I never knew anything about it. We employed three French lawyers. They did all the dirty work. They merely sent us the bills, and we paid them after they had showed us a list of the men they had 'approached.' It was that list that frightened me. It made me feel that there was not an honest man left in all France. And if there should be another war, I am afraid that this time there would not be another Verdun. There won't even be much of a fight. France will blow up like a kid's balloon hit by papa's cigar."

"And worst of all, the brighter Frenchmen seem perfectly aware of this, but they shrug their shoulders and say, 'What can we do? It is the Government that is at fault. We now have a democracy, *notre chère démocratie française*!' And they are right. They have their famous French democracy. Every third-rate provincial lawyer considers himself a Danton, every country doctor feels that he is destined to become another Clemenceau. But none of them care a hoot for the country as a whole. On every street-corner some one is making a speech. In every café some

one is writing out a new constitution. Once upon a time France was a nation of philosophers. They were a bit vague, these famous men of the eighteenth century, but at least they accomplished something. To-day France is merely a debating society in which everybody talks and nobody listens. How those fellows love to fill the air with words! But to do this they need a lot of money, and that money they will take from anyone willing to give them a little financial support. In the meantime the country goes to hell."

This led to a general discussion upon the subject of *la France éternelle*, and the talk finally dwindled down to an inquiry into the state of modern French literature. For reasons known only to the Lord Himself, the world suddenly had got tremendously interested in the works of Marcel Proust. Neither Frits nor I (and in this one respect, even Lucie agreed with us) thought very highly of Proust. We found him unhealthy and attributed his momentary success to the fact that having spent all his life surrounded by superficial and dull people, who thought only of themselves and their own petty interests, the sickly Proust was ideally fitted to be the prophet of a time that had lost all faith in itself.

Jimmie, who never had had much use for the French (for no particular reason except that she just did not like them), soon dropped out of the conversation and started knitting away at a pair of woollen socks she had promised to the captain of the *Nieuw Amsterdam*. Lucie and Frits and I then continued by ourselves until it was time to switch over from breakfast to lunch. This was easily accomplished, for the process consisted in starting a fresh pot of coffee and ordering some more toast. By the time Kaatje had brought the coffee and the toast, Lucie had sufficiently regained her spirits to reaffirm her conviction that no matter what might happen, there always would be a France. Not only that, but she prophesied the coming of a new and brilliant crop of writers who would save the French from themselves and would bring about that 'renewal of the spirit' which had never failed to take place in the glorious land of the Gauls whenever they were on the point of being engulfed by either a foreign or a domestic enemy.

It was this discussion (which, by the way, never got anywhere at all, like most such talks) which made me suggest to Frits that we invite the two French men of letters who had always interested me more than any others—Montaigne and Rabelais.

"A queer combination," said Frits, "but an interesting one. And they will be much more cheerful company than our gloomy friend from hell last week."

I told him that that was hardly the way to talk about the author of *The Divine Comedy*, but he refused to apologize. "Old Leonardo was a

grand person," he agreed, "but that long-faced Florentine with the laurel leaves dangling from his cap, who sat and sat and drank our wine and said nothing at all and made Jo feed hot coals and carbolic acid to his pet hog—no, I am afraid he did not impress me very much. But the old painter and inventor—he was wonderful! I hope he got home safely and did not break his neck."

Then and there we decided on our new guests. Next Saturday we would request the honour of the presence of François Rabelais, M.D., of Lyons, France, and Michel de Montaigne, honorary citizen of Rome, Italy.

They had been contemporaries and they had been Frenchmen. Here was a chance to go in for some fancy culinary effects. For once, too, we would have experienced wine-drinkers with us, as Montaigne came from Bordeaux, and Rabelais hailed from the Touraine. There was only one wine that was good enough for these true connoisseurs, and by chance I had been offered a dozen bottles of it only a few days before. I refer, of course, to Châteauneuf du Pape and Châteauneuf of the vintage of the year 1921. Neither Frits nor I believed in the theory that a meal can be enjoyed only if you serve a different wine with every course. One kind, either red or white, drunk all through the meal is much more satisfactory, provided it is of outstanding quality, and the sun-baked grapes of the hillsides near the old papal city of Avignon—when they are at their best—no, they have never been surpassed.

The menu was not so easily settled. We intended to do our best, and I felt that I needed Lucie's help if we wanted to surpass all our previous efforts. We spent the whole afternoon on the meal and turned the leaves of my old *Cuisinier français* until both of us were dizzy. Here is what we finally chose.

First of all, a *soupe à l'oignon à la Stanislas*. This was absolutely safe. Every Frenchman seems to have an inborn passion for onion soup, and so we could not possibly go wrong.

Next, *filets de sole à la sauce ravigote*, and as our main course, *faisans à la Périgueux*. The latter would have to be served in the ancient style with their feathers on so as to give them a lifelike appearance, a job which Hein, who was the handy-man around the house, would love to undertake. The vegetables were to be the inevitable string beans and carrots, for Holland in the autumn does not offer much of a choice when it comes to fresh vegetables, and we tried as much as possible to do without canned ones.

After the pheasant there was to be a huge bowl of salad with hard-boiled eggs and that tiny bit of garlic in the dressing which all Frenchmen



and Italians so dearly love. For the benefit of Erasmus and the other Dutchmen, there also must be a small leek cut up in slices, and tarragon vinegar, of course.

And then (for this time we would have guests who knew what a real dinner should be), an extra course right after the bird—a course consisting of cold lobster with mayonnaise (Lucie had offered to make her own special mayonnaise for us that evening), and finally, for dessert, a *macédoine de fruits à la kirsch*. The fruits would have to be preserved ones, but at The Hague we could get the pineapple in which to serve it.

Coffee? Yes—no—yes! Erasmus had come to depend upon his little after-dinner cup, so why not let the others try it too? If they did not like it, they need not drink it.

After dinner, only one liqueur—the last bottle of our 1837 cognac, but, as far as I was concerned, the best was hardly good enough for Montaigne. I owed him a heavy debt of gratitude. When I was quite young, his book had become my Bible, and it has remained so ever since.

I need offer no apologies for my interest in Montaigne. He is one of those perfectly mannered philosophers whom you can safely take with you into any kind of company. Perhaps a word or so beforehand to your hostess, just as an act of civility. “Elizabeth, my dear, do you mind if I bring a very charming Frenchman with me to-night? He won’t be any bother, he is an old friend and I am sure you will like him.”

“Why, of course not! Bring him by all means, and what did you say his name was?”

“Montaigne—Michel de Montaigne. He is a writer. Several of his books have been translated into English. You may have heard of him.”

“Of course I have! The last time we were on the Riviera we met some delightful people by that name—French people from Bordeaux, I think. Perhaps he’s related to them?”

“Very likely, and he will be so much interested to hear about his cousins. Thank you for your kindness! You want to see us at about seven—if I remember correctly.”

“That is what the invitation said. But I know you are not a drinker. It will probably be eight o’clock before we sit down at table, so suppose you and your friend come at seven-thirty, unless he insists upon a few cocktails.”

“I hardly think so. He has gout. He has to be very careful about what he drinks.”

“Fine! Seven-thirty it is, and we’ll be delighted to meet your French friend, Monsieur de Montaigne. Good-night! My love to Jimmie and Noodle.”

"Good-night, and thank you."

Whereupon you tell Michel that you are sorry you have got to take him out for dinner the night he is coming, but it is Thursday and the servants have that day off. Besides, your friends, the Whoozises, have a lovely house. They also put up a very good table. The husband is perhaps not very exciting, but Elizabeth is very beautiful, if a bit gushing. And Jimmie will pretend that she has a headache and will use that as an excuse to go home early. And then we can sit in the library the rest of the evening and have a glass of hot Swedish punch and talk about the happy days the last time we met in Paris.

Then it is Thursday, and the party is a delightful affair. Your friend Michel is the success of the evening. He has been everywhere and he knows everybody and he is terribly good at telling amusing stories, and one of the guests, a college professor, has even read some of his books, though he does not entirely approve of the author's style, and the hostess is delighted and is very grateful to you for having brought that charming and delightful guest.

But Rabelais? He is a different kettle of fish altogether, and the moment you mention his name, your friend raises an inquiring eyebrow and says, "Rabelais! You surely cannot mean that you would expose us to the man who wrote those horrible stories about a giant—let me see—what was his name? Gargantua or something like that—just like the big ape. For if it is he I will have to rearrange my whole table. I could not very well let him sit next to Aunt Mary, who is going to be with us that night. Her father, you remember, was a bishop. And then John's boss is going to be there too, the president of the bank for which he works, and he is an elder in a Congregational church. He is rather a puritan too, except that he likes his cocktails, and of course, I don't want to spoil John's chances. I suppose, if you insist, I have got to let you bring him, but ask him not to use those dreadful words of which his books are so full. They may be funny to some people, but I never could see why words must be dirty in order to be funny, and so—you won't mind, will you?—but please tell him to be as nice as that other friend of yours, that Monsieur de Montaigne whom you brought that other time. We all loved him!"

Unfortunately, that is more or less the reputation poor Dr Rabelais has acquired during the last four hundred years. He is now chiefly known as a man who wallowed in dirt for dirt's sake, who created gigantic figures, obscene and grotesque figures, for the sheer joy of having them perform obscene and grotesque arts, and as an author who may have been funny in the eyes of his contemporaries but who to-day should no longer be tolerated in polite society.

There is an element of truth in this harsh condemnation. Gargantua and Pantagruel are not quite house-trained from the point of view of our modern world. They are a little too earthy for people who live so far removed from the soil. And as for the Abbey of Thélème, where everybody was supposed to behave exactly as he liked—no, such an institution too cannot really have been a very happy place in our eyes, and those jokes which made the English of the time of Queen Bess rock with laughter (for Rabelais was the most popular of all Continental writers in the England of the last half of the sixteenth century)—those verbal quips too, which he handled with such fatal facility—are no longer welcome among the kind of people who are on intimate terms with the findings of Professor Freud and his disciples and who now know what it all means.

I realize all this and, as I said a moment ago, I even agree with some of it, but just the same, Rabelais is one of the authors who fills a very prominent niche in my private pantheon of literature. I did not bestow this place of honour upon him on account of his literary abilities. I doubt whether he really wrote very well, and I agree with those who hold that his work is no longer readable. He is almost as much dated as Sir Walter Scott.

But there is no use in arranging a man-hunt after him, chasing the poor Doctor with the bloodhounds of our watch-and-ward societies and delivering him into the hands of the local magistrates. He is really no longer a menace to the younger generation. The younger generation knows him as the man who wrote that funny book about funny giants who would pull up castles like carrots and then would throw them at their enemies as if they had been pebbles, after the pattern of Dean Swift's Brobdingnagians, and the very young one is only familiar with all the different supermen of the air and the comics, compared with whom Gargantua and his cronies are gentlemen of high moral repute.

Then why did I want to meet Rabelais so much that I asked him for dinner in preference to hundreds of other more likely candidates?

For one thing, although he may not have given us a book of superior literary value, he did something almost as difficult. Like our friend, Don Miguel de Cervantes, he sat himself down, picked up his pen and his inkhorn, and gave life to a couple of paper characters who not only incorporated themselves into every known tongue but who were so full of vitality and joy of living that they became infinitely more real than hundreds of millions of people who have actually existed.

To succeed in this ambitious enterprise, my good Frits, takes a rare amount of courage and ability. For the author undertakes to set himself up in open competition with the good Lord who, as both the Old and the New Testaments inform us, is not exactly conspicuous for his lack of

envy and who only tolerates such rivalry when he fully approves of the efforts of his human contestants. Let me show you what I mean by a concrete example. What does King Henry of France mean to us, of to-day? At best a name and a date, unless we remember his Majesty because he was said to have been the lover of the beautiful Diane de Poitiers, the girl whose statue still delights us when we meet her in the Louvre.

But say Gargantua or Pantagruel, and we find ourselves immediately in the heart of a mysterious land of giants and titans, with King Gargousier making merry war on his neighbour, King Picrochole, and with Friar John—and what a friar!—deliberately and successfully upsetting all the accepted rules of sound pedagogy, while in the distance we behold the Abbey of Thélème standing forth in majestic glory and quietly reflecting its high walls and its slender turrets in the blue waves of a lovely mountain lake.

Not that Rabelais was the only writer who ever succeeded in doing this sort of thing. We have already mentioned the author of *Don Quixote*. Then there was the famous case connected with Queen Anne of England. That lady was about as complete a nonentity as ever graced a throne. Talk about Queen Anne, and at best she will remind the average listener of beautiful little tables with very slender legs (not by any means modelled after those of her Majesty!) and of certain other pieces of furniture that stood in Grandmother's parlour. But mention the two magic words *Robinson Crusoe*, and forthwith a lonely island rises from the placid Pacific and a man with a beard and a funny-looking peaked cap is anxiously studying strange footsteps in the sands of the shore, and we become young once more and we have just built a hut in the empty lot next door and we are waiting for our own man Friday (our younger brother turned blackamoor by means of a burnt cork) to come and tell us that he has seen the sails of a ship rapidly approaching our domains, which means that we must make ready to defend our possessions against still another attack of buccaneers.

Or, again, who to-day still takes the slightest interest in George I or George II, or, for that matter, in the policies of a Walpole or a Pitt? But every one of us is so thoroughly familiar with the land of Lilliput that we would not be in the least surprised if in some hidden corner of New Zealand, a few hundred miles beyond Erewhon, a traveller should suddenly have come upon the last remaining survivors of the tribe of the Lilliputians, living there peacefully in their tiny houses, eating from miniature plates and raising diminutive children who go sailing in nutshells on

week, who gave us an *Inferno* (which he most surely can never have seen with his own eyes) vastly more convincing to us than all the real countries any of us have ever read about in Baedeker.

One final idea upon this pleasant subject. Were not the men and women and the dogs and cats whom we met in the pages of Hans Christian Andersen's fairy-tales infinitely more real than those flesh-and-blood uncles and aunts whom we had to visit every Sunday and of whom we remember nothing except that Uncle Moritz wore a wig and that Aunt Amy had a red nose as the result of a perpetual cold? But was there any doubt about the number of buttons on the coat of Hans Christian's soldier?

As for the life of Rabelais, there really is not very much to tell. He was born about two years before Columbus discovered America. He saw the light of day in Chinon, a small town in the province of Touraine. His father was either an apothecary (most likely) or a tavern-keeper (less likely). While still quite young he was persuaded to enter a Franciscan monastery, but he soon became suspected of heresies, chiefly on account of his preference for the study of the law over that of religion. He was not actually found guilty, but just the same he thought it wiser to bid farewell to his Franciscan brethren, and to join the Benedictines, who made a speciality of learning, in contrast to the Franciscans, who went in primarily for preaching and were rather suspicious of the wisdom of this world.

After five more years of a cloistered existence, Rabelais began to feel that he had made a mistake in the choice of his vocation and that he would never make a good monk. He then tried to qualify as a secular priest, but with even less success. As he would have to make some kind of living, he next played with the idea of becoming a physician. He went to the University of Montpellier and at last he had found his true vocation. In less than a year's time he was allowed to deliver lectures on Galen and Hippocrates, the two great oracles upon whose books (written respectively thirteen hundred and nineteen hundred years before) the doctors of that day depended exclusively for their diagnoses and clinical information.

Here and there in Italy a few courageous surgeons had reached the bold conclusion that in order to know all about sick people one should with one's own eyes observe and study sick people. But as the Church remained adamant in its opposition to the dissecting of human bodies, anatomy was still in its infancy, and when the physician came to the bedside of his patient, he would look up his symptoms in his copies of Galen and Hippocrates and would then dose him according to the somewhat antiquated prescriptions of these ancient worthies. It was not a

very satisfactory system from the point of view of the patient, who usually died, but it saved his doctor from being burned at the stake, and the doctors therefore were quite willing to let bad enough alone.

In the year 1532, Rabelais left Montpellier, knowing as much about medicine as could be learned in those days of endless pills and purges, and settled down in the city of Lyons, where he was appointed intern to the town hospital and was allowed to do something so bold that it was considered positively revolutionary. He was given permission to lecture on anatomy with demonstrations from the human body.

It was during his internship in Lyons that Rabelais began to do a little writing, as we would say to-day. Out of these early attempts grew the gigantic world of Gargantua, Pantagruel, and all their jovial companions. He worked at his books only in his spare time—or at least he said so—but the city fathers, who soon became aware of his literary ambitions, had reasons to doubt this and were not at all pleased. The pride of their hospital was supposed to attend to the business of curing the sick and could not go gallivanting all over the countryside whenever his muse got hold of him. This was a serious matter, for, contrary to all rules, the eminent Dr Rabelais had got into the habit of taking French leave whenever he tired of his job and on such occasions he was apt to stay away for two or three weeks at a time, only showing up when he had finished a few more chapters and was ready to undergo a little more hospital drudgery.

As a sixteenth-century surgeon was not, as a rule, a rich man, the magistrates at first wondered where their doctor went during those self-granted vacations. Rabelais was more than willing to tell. As a young man he had gained the good-will of a very powerful family—that of the du Bellays. When one of the du Bellay sons became a cardinal, Rabelais on several occasions accompanied him to Rome. This token of high clerical favour gave him such an excellent social rating with the Lyons magistrates that instead of fining him, as they would have done any ordinary doctor, or curtly dismissing him, they meekly appointed a substitute whenever their regular house physician chose to play hooky. It was, from their intern's point of view, an almost ideal arrangement and undoubtedly of great benefit to the patients.

Well, the years went by, and the Rabelaisian manuscript increased in size so much that it had attracted the attention of both the court and the Sorbonne. The Sorbonne (ever faithful to its reputation of being an ice-house of reactionary sentiments) gave evidence of its interest in this strange medical cleric by condemning his books and ordering them to be burned by the public hangman. That was a sign to the royal court, then presided over by the amiable and accomplished King Francis I, to show its appreciation of the Doctor's works by reading them, by laughing over them

most uproariously, and by giving an unmistakable hint to the theologians of his Majesty's most loyal University of Paris to please mind their own business and allow the favourite author of the King to go on writing as he pleased.

As a further token of approval, this monarch's successor, in the year 1550, obtained for Dr Rabelais (via the inevitable du Bellays) two livings which allowed the eminent author to devote himself exclusively to his literary labours, for it is now known that he never officiated in either Meudon or St Christophe de Jambet. He contented himself with pocketing his pay and lived happily—and why not, as it was the custom of the times and no one took offence at a little 'graft' of that sort?

Three years later, Dr the Reverend Father François Rabelais died, and that is all there is to my story. Just that and nothing more. But as with several of our other guests, the work they had done was far more important than they themselves and, in the case of Rabelais, the book was the thing or, more precisely, the hero of the book, the mysterious giant called Gargantua.

That name had not been invented by Rabelais. Gargantua had already enjoyed several centuries of fame and popularity long before Rabelais was born. He had started his career as a kind of medieval Paul Bunyan, but he did not really force himself upon the attention of the public at large until Rabelais got hold of him and gave him the leading rôle in his famous satire. As Gargantua, as far as I know, has not yet been put into the movies, his adventures are probably unknown to the younger generation which now derives most of its literary and historical information from the learned pedagogues of Hollywood. It may therefore not be out of place if I present you with a very brief synopsis of Gargantua's career.

In volume one a behemothian baby is born to behemothian parents. His arrival is celebrated by a colossal feast at which both the eating and the drinking assume mammoth proportions. Next the hero goes to school, and this gives Rabelais a chance to express his opinions upon the subject of contemporary educational methods. The eminent Doctor had as little love for the system of the Schoolmen (who were then still in full control of all educational establishments) as I have for that under which I was brought up in my native land fifty years ago. He exposes it in all its preposterous absurdity. He shows it up for what it is and then asks why children must be forced to wander for years through the petrified forest of a dead learning when, with so much more profit to themselves, they could have been turned loose into the delectable gardens of the Muses which the humanists had once more made available to the public at large but from which the younger generation was still excluded by all sorts of theological *verboden* signs.

Having thus paid his respects to the field of education, the good Doctor then examines the inanities of warfare as practised in every part of the world, and through the mouth of a certain Friar John he gives us a circumstantial account of the violence with which Gargantua's father and his neighbour, King Picrochole, went after each other, smote their hundreds of thousands, and left everything exactly as it had been before.

This conflict, which settled nothing, having come to an end by means of a peace which settled even less, Gargantua decides to go in for a short detour which leads him into the field of social service. I am sorry to say that the method he chooses to improve his fellow-men and make them conscious of their duties towards each other is not quite according to our modern pattern. There was, of course, nothing new about the idea of building a religious retreat. Monasteries had been going up for more than twelve hundred years. But the Abbey of Thélème of which Gargantua became the founder was indeed a unique institution. For whereas, in all other similar establishments, you were supposed to spend your life in sackcloth and ashes, performing highly uncongenial tasks, the rules of Thélème insisted that you do exactly as you please.

In making an arrangement of that sort, Rabelais showed a lamentable lack of understanding of man's true nature. I cannot for the life of me imagine anything more dreadful than to be obliged all day long to do what I want to do. But I think that I know what was actually in the good Doctor's mind. Rabelais lived in an age of repressions and as a physician he realized what too much moral restraint will do to the average normal human being. His abbey, with its gay device of "Do as you please," was really a sort of sixteenth-century sanatorium maintained for the benefit of those who needed a few months' escape from the burdens of everyday life. Our modern psychiatrists might well look into this matter. An Abbey of Thélème built in the heart of many of our more isolated country districts would save hundreds of thousands of poor women from their unavoidable fate and would therefore be a godsend to the taxpayer, a good proportion of whose involuntary contributions to the state now go to the maintenance of our lunatic asylums.

There is a lot more in the chronicle of Gargantua, but these little excerpts will do. They will have shown you that Dr Rabelais' flight into the realm of fancy was of a very different nature from that of Signor Dante, who also constructed a non-existent world in order that he might give us his reflections upon its living counterpart. What Dante meant to achieve was so simple that everybody could understand it. He meant to settle his private score with those who had thwarted him in his political ambitions. But even now, after almost four centuries of careful studies, the friends



of Dr Rabelais are not quite sure what he had in mind when he sent his hero forth upon his strange peregrinations and created his Pantagruelian world to prove—what?

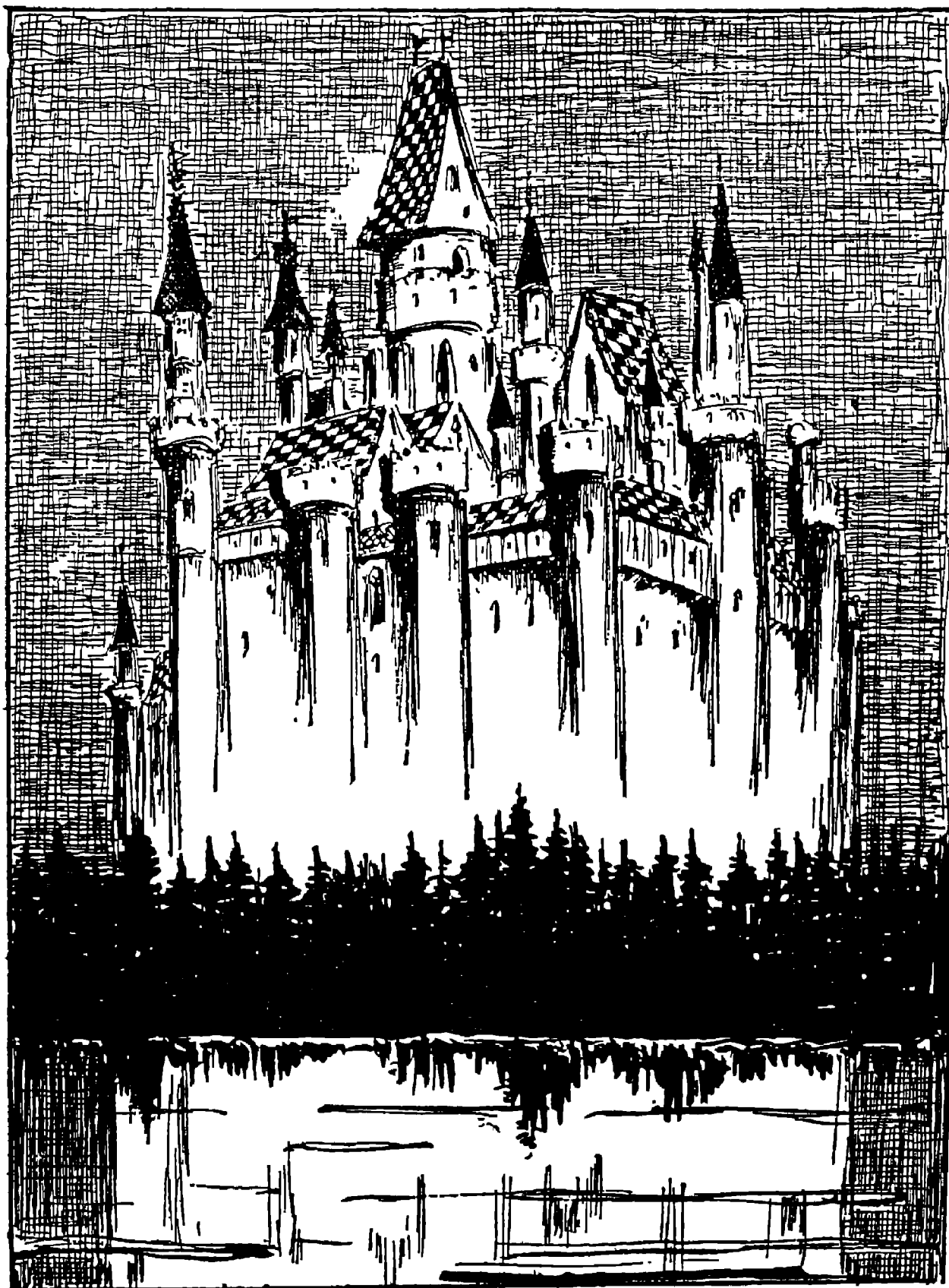
That is what we would like to know but have never yet found out with sufficient certainty to reduce the good Doctor to a single formula.

According to Webster, Pantagruelism is “the theory of practice of Pantagruel; buffoonery or coarse humour with a satirical or serious purpose.” Suppose we dismiss the reference to the “coarse humour.” You and I, my dear Frits, belong to a race which has its roots so deeply struck into the soil of the Middle Ages that this so-called coarseness is still part of our own nature. We are careful to hide it from strangers, for they would not understand and would merely be embarrassed. But when we are alone with the simple folk of Zeeland or Holland or Flanders we not only can be very, very Rabelaisian (in the accepted Anglo-Saxon sense of the word), but we find ourselves completely at home in that strange atmosphere of puns, whimsicalities, drolleries, jocosities, quiddities, quirks, and quips which seem to have been the delight of the people of four hundred years ago. To them, the much-decried vulgarity of Rabelais was not at all out of place. It fulfilled a perfectly natural literary function and it was the method by means of which Rabelais hoped to make people take an interest in what he had to say.

The fact that from the king down almost every Frenchman of that era was able to derive a sincere enjoyment from his copy of the *Grandes et inestimables chroniques* proves that the author had been right in choosing that particular form of approach.

And now one final word, almost inevitable in our age that is so conscious of its social obligations towards its fellow-countrymen. Did Rabelais have what nowadays we call a ‘message’? I doubt it. I find no evidence that he ever thought of himself as a reformer and I am sure that he would have greatly resented being classified among the contemporary uplifters. But in spite of his pretence that he wrote only to please himself, he must have known that there was a great deal more to his book than appeared on the surface.

Rabelais was a bright fellow and apparently a most kind-hearted person. He lived in a world of gross superstition and ignorance, a world in which people were continually committing acts of the most inexcusable cruelty and for no very evident reason. It is undoubtedly true that during the previous century there had been a certain enlightenment among the better situated classes, those who could afford that leisure which is necessary for the development of the graces of life. But the submerged masses were still as hopelessly brutalized as they had always been. They continued to share their grubby existence with their domestic



THE ABBEY OF THÉLÈME—THE DREAM OF RABELAIS'S LIFE

animals. They never had quite enough to eat and were prevented from committing all sorts of abominable acts of lawlessness upon each other only by that fear of hell by means of which the Church had managed to keep its charges within certain rather elementary but highly necessary bounds of decency for at least part of the time.

Rabelais wanted to depict the world in which he lived in such a way that every one would understand him, and he chose to do this by creating his absurd world of giants. Erasmus (whom Rabelais revered as his master), being a different kind of person, had made his little puppets dance their merry jigs in his *Praise of Folly*. To show his fellow-men what he thought of the prevailing state of society, Thomas More had created his *Utopia*, that he might depict the kind of universe of which he dreamed as the ultimate and most desirable place of residence for all men of good-will. Cervantes had given form and shape to his preposterous knight that the creature might persuade his fellow-Spaniards to take stock of themselves and perhaps mend their ways so that they would no longer be the laughing-stock of the rest of the world. I have already mentioned Dean Swift and his Lilliputians and Brobdingnagians who were to make the self-satisfied Georgians conscious of their own foibles and shortcomings. Still one century later Samuel Butler returned from his disastrous sheep-raising adventure in New Zealand with news about *Erewhon*, the Land of Nowhere, which was so wisely administered that it should serve as an example to all others and become the Land of Everywhere.

Rabelais, being a Frenchman of the early half of the sixteenth century, had quite naturally availed himself of that literary form which he knew to be best suited to his own kind of reader. And by sticking to his last, he undoubtedly succeeded in making himself the most brilliant social exponent of his own era. He pretended to be immoderately desirous of life because he felt a deep hatred for the image of death which grinned at him from every corner. He acted the clown that he might hide that hopeless sense of melancholy which was really at the bottom of his sensitive nature, and he played the fool because he knew that that was the only way in which he could make his neighbours partake of at least some of his wisdom. To sum it all up in a single sentence, Rabelais, in order to achieve his ultimate purpose, was willing to let himself be condemned for the very vulgarities by means of which he endeavoured to cover up his deep and everlasting love for his fellow-men.

Wherever I go, my copy of the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne accompanies me. Not that I read it every morning and evening, as our ancestors used to peruse their Old Testament. I am not obliged to face the odds of a Dutch skipper of the sixteenth century who had set forth to conquer

a tropical empire fifty times larger than the homeland and who depended for his safety against hundreds of thousands of natives upon a handful of ex-convicts armed with harquebuses and swords. My tribulations are of a different sort and do not as constantly affect me. But when the whole world seems to be out of gear (as it does these days with ever-increasing regularity), then it is very soothing to have old Michel by the side of your bed and spend half an hour communing with him before you find escape in sleep.

I have been fortunate enough in life to come across quite a few people who were endowed with such delightfully even temperaments that they could take you completely out of yourself and were able to make you forget all the tribulations of the day. But the number of books able to perform this same useful service is very small indeed. I tried to write them all down last night and I could not think of more than half a dozen which qualified for my list of honour, and think of the millions of books that have been printed since old John Gooseflesh, *vulgo* Gutenberg, died in poverty and obscurity!

Now Montaigne is the one man who has never failed me, and for that reason I respect and venerate his name. Sometimes, I must confess, I will skip a few of his classical references, for I was taught Latin and Greek so badly that even after seven years of hard labour among Homer and Virgil they are still picture puzzles to me which have to be solved more by luck than by actual knowledge.

Montaigne, who seems to have absorbed his classics together with his mother's milk, quoted Homer and Ovid as readily as I quote Goethe or Vondel. It meant absolutely nothing to him to slide from French into the tongue of the Romans and the Athenians and then back again into his native French. To me, those lines of Plutarch and Cicero, with which he juggled so elegantly, mean a painful groping for half-forgotten words and completely forgotten rules of syntax, and therefore I usually hasten as quickly as I can through those pages in which the Frenchman indulges in his favourite hobby. That, however, is an easy trick for a fast reader (as any honest book-reviewer will confess), and there remains the bulk of the text, which like a mighty mountain stream rushes towards the sea through a landscape of unparalleled charm and loveliness. Let me but spend half an hour on the banks of this river, and all will be well again with me and with the world at large. Wherefore I here and now pay homage to Michel de Montaigne's memory and gratefully proclaim myself his most humble pupil.

My good teacher was born in February of the year 1533. He therefore was another one of those winter babies who have played such an important rôle in the history of the world because they were conceived in the spring,

the time of year which from the beginning of creation has been the natural mating season for all mammals, including *Homo sapiens*.

Montaigne's family name was Eyquem, but the Eyquem had been dropped after the family had obtained possession of the castle of Montaigne, not far from the city of Bordeaux in the southern part of France. Michel's father, Pierre Eyquem de Montaigne, had been in trade and so had his grandfather. Those who did not like Michel (and he was far too witty not to have made himself some very choice enemies) were very apt to hint that this change in name had been the result of a desire to make the public at large forget the very honourable beginnings of the now distinguished family. There may have been some truth in this accusation. The desire for a fine-looking genealogy going back to the days of Cæsar and a coat of arms of sixteen quarterings is a perfectly normal one and a very harmless hobby, compared with the foolish ways in which rich people are apt to spend their money. But as Montaigne, in his books at least, gives no evidence whatsoever of any kind of intellectual and political snobbery, we can dismiss this bit of gossip as envy on the part of his less enlightened neighbours.

To-day they would probably have attacked him from a somewhat different angle. They would have inquired into his mother's ancestry and then would have given each other a knowing look: "You see? We told you so!" For his mother was undoubtedly of Jewish origin, and that of course explained why her son was so much quicker and so much more cosmopolitan than the ordinary, hundred per cent. pure Frenchman.

It sounds familiar, doesn't it? It sounds painfully familiar. And what can we do about it? Not very much, I am afraid, until we shall have changed our entire system of education and shall have cured our children of the belief that there is such a thing as a chosen race, which is as absurd a claim as that of belonging to a super-race.

Yes, Montaigne's mother was undoubtedly Jewish. She belonged to the powerful family of the Louppesses (now modernized into Lopez) which for many centuries had played quite a rôle in Spanish history. During the government of that doleful couple of fanatics, Ferdinand and Isabella, the Louppesses had been forced to accept baptism. The few drops of holy water sprinkled upon their foreheads may have performed a miracle in the matter of faith, but they had not been able to extinguish the flames of genius which burned so brightly in that extraordinary family, and if Montaigne must be accepted as a typical result of a mixed marriage, then I can only regret that both my parents and all my ancestors were so one-sidedly Dutch.

Montaigne's father too seems to have been a man of more than ordinary ability, a queerish sort of person and saved by his intelligence and common

sense from being a freak. He was very original in his educational theories. After Michel became his heir—in consequence of the death of his two older brothers—the father decided that his only surviving son must be given every opportunity to amount to something. Believing that a direct contact with good earth was essential to every child's physical welfare, old Montaigne sent the infant to be nursed by a peasant woman in a near-by village and insisted that the son of the squire be brought up on a footing of absolute equality with the children of his future retainers. After his preliminary course in the simpler aspects of life, little Michel was brought back to his father's castle. But here he was attended by servants who spoke only Latin (God knows where Papa Montaigne had found them!), and every morning he was awakened by the playing of beautiful music.

This so hastened the intellectual development of the boy that already at the age of six he was ready to go to a public school, which in Europe has always meant a private school—to differentiate it from a clerical school. At thirteen he proceeded from his private school to the university. There he studied law, and at the age of twenty-one we find him a member of the town government of Bordeaux.

Such a career was, of course, only possible for a young gentleman of independent means and with a considerable amount of political pull. These same fortunate circumstances enabled Michel to pay frequent visits to the court in Paris. They also accounted for his term of service in the royal army. Otherwise there is nothing much to report about the first thirty years of our guest's life.

Montaigne was a very civil young man (as there were thousands of others in the France of that era). He went out into society (as did thousands of other polite young men in France at that time). But when he had eaten all the dinners that were to be eaten (although in moderation) and had drunk all the wine there was to be drunk (see above!) and had made love to all the charming young women who were there to be made love to (not quite so moderately, I regret to say), he did something that none of the other polite young men of France of that time had ever thought of doing. He not only confessed that his present mode of existence had greatly begun to pall upon him as an unprofitable waste of energy, but he also announced that he intended to devote the rest of his days to some useful task and henceforth would not merely content himself with political sinecures and the administration of his estate.

The useful task Montaigne thereupon set himself was nothing less than the writing of a book in which, for the first time in the history of the human race, a man would tell about himself and his reactions to everything that had ever happened to him with *absolute honesty*. Let me repeat it—WITH ABSOLUTE HONESTY.

Montaigne started work on his *Essais* in the year 1577, and they kept him busy until the day of his death in the year 1592. Occasionally he still did a bit of travelling, mostly in connexion with his health or on some official mission. But during the greater part of those last fifteen years he dwelled happily and contentedly in his famous brick tower, and whenever he was forced to leave his hermitage he counted the days until he should be able to return to that quiet spot where he could really be himself and where he could devote all his working hours to the agreeable pursuit of depicting Michel de Montaigne as he actually was and not as he tried to make himself appear in the eyes of his friends and neighbours.

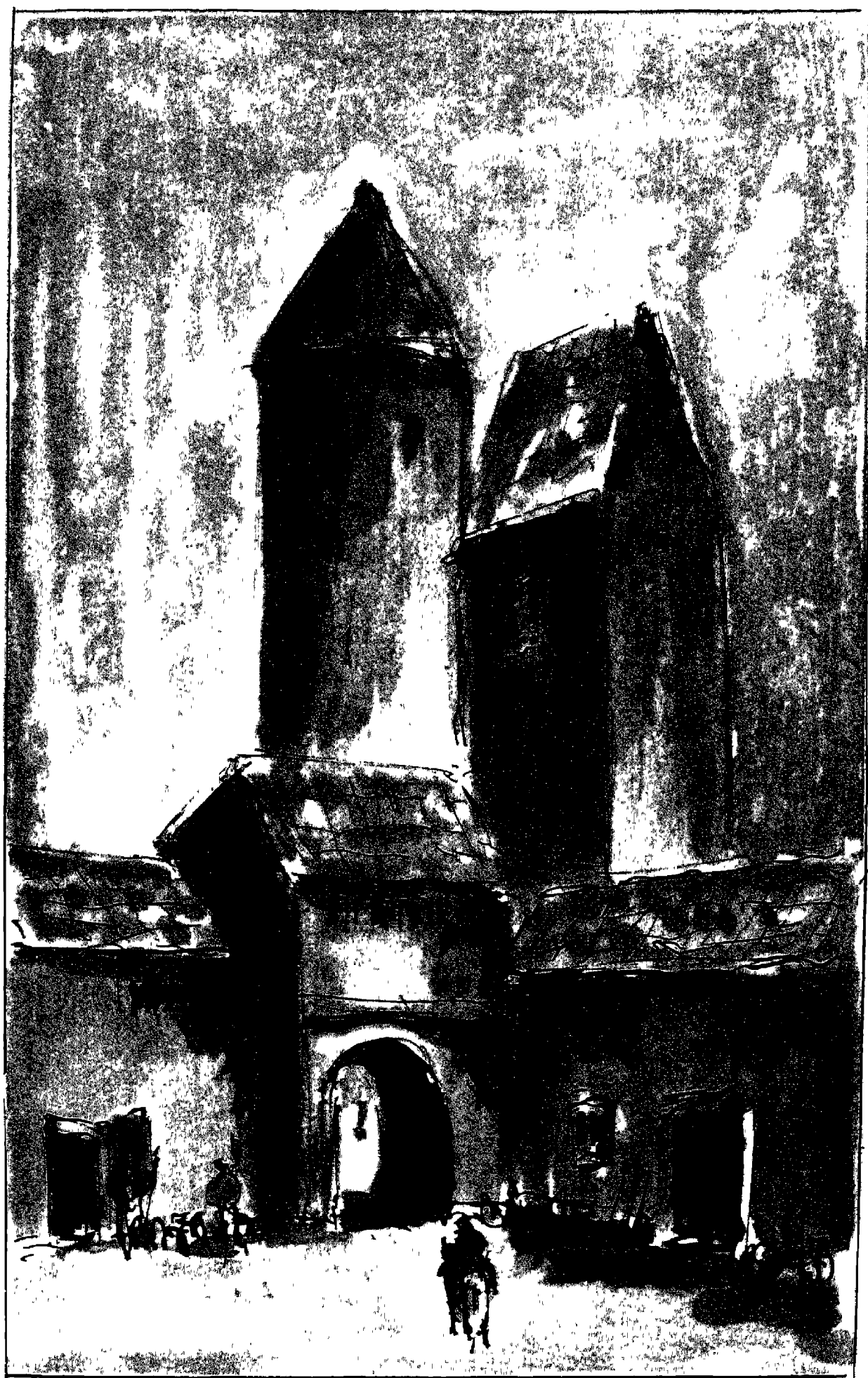
A great many other people have tried to follow his example, but few of them have ever succeeded as brilliantly as this grandson of a French herring-merchant and a baptized Spanish Jew.

Montaigne had enjoyed one great friendship during the early half of his life. The name of his beloved companion was Étienne de la Boétie. It is quite likely that the death of de la Boétie had affected him so deeply that it contributed to his decision to withdraw from all further worldly pursuits.

This surmise (I have nothing concrete to prove it) is borne out by the fact that Montaigne, before he started work upon his own autobiography (for what else are the essays but the autobiography of a singularly honest man?), had spent considerable time editing the works of his friend, who had already gained some renown as a poet before his unexpected and untimely death.

After this labour of love had been finished, Montaigne took a clean sheet of paper and wrote his famous first sentence: "This, good reader, is a book written in a spirit of complete honesty." I think that it is only fair to say that when he put *finis* to the last chapter, he had most faithfully lived up to that promise. The essays are indeed the honest revelations of one man's innermost feelings. By sheer good fortune, it so happened that Montaigne was able to contribute the most important of all the many ingredients which are necessary if such a book is to be a success. He not only had character, but in addition he also was a character. And it was undoubtedly the happy combination of these two traits which gave his work that freshness which has made it one of the most obstinate best sellers of the last four centuries.

It is said of my dear friend, Stephen Bonsal, that although he has done more travelling than any other human being and has been in more places than seems quite possible, he never starts forth upon a fresh trip—be it merely to proceed from Washington to Georgetown—without feeling that this is going to be an entirely new and most glorious adventure. Montaigne shared Stephen Bonsal's happy attitude towards life. In the



MONTAIGNE'S IVORY TOWER





GARGANTUA HAD SAT DOWN TO LUNCH ON THE ROOF OF  
OUR TOWN HALL

[See page 524]

morning he got up, went to Holy Mass (for he was most faithful in the observation of his religious duties), partook of his breakfast, and then took a look out of his lofty tower window. After so many years, he should have known the landscape by heart, but every time it delighted him as much as if he had never seen it before, and whatever caught his eye became thereupon a welcome subject for a short meditative essay.

That everlasting sense of wonder undoubtedly accounts for the delightful and ever-surprising variety among the titles of his chapters. "On Being Sad" precedes a dissertation upon "Philosophy as a Means of Learning How to Die Happily." After he has pondered upon the unfortunate consequences of being a pedant, he discusses the desirability of reading lots of good books. Cannibals attract his attention, but so does male and female dress. Having delivered himself of two short sermons upon "The Art of Going to Sleep" and "The Vanity of Words," he will suddenly ask himself how it is possible "to laugh and cry over the same thing at the same moment."

Drunkenness comes in for some very poignant remarks, but so does abstinence. Friendship and loyalty too are studied as carefully as the ceremonies which prevail at royal courts and the fact that what is caviar to one person is nothing but a dish of over-salty fish-eggs to the next one.

This method of writing without design quite naturally divides Montaigne's readers into two hostile camps. Those who believe that we should go through life browsing and that the joy of a journey consists in following every possible detour rather than in reaching the place of your destination in the shortest possible period of time—they will love Montaigne and will find him the best of travelling companions. Whereas the boys and girls who want to get things done and who want to save time (and for what purpose, may I ask?) will call him a hopeless egotist and will refuse to have anything to do with him.

They make no bones about their feelings. "We will wait until the 'Confessions of Raymund de Sabunde' (isn't that the chapter in which he is supposed to explain his own philosophy of life?) has been reduced to three pages," so they will tell you, "and then we will read it in one of our digest magazines (provided we have nothing better to do), but until that shall have been done, the old Frenchman is too wordy for us, he talks too much, he is one of those French bores who will waste a whole afternoon over one single glass of wine, discussing the meaning of a certain line in the latest opus of some long-haired poet who has just starved in a garret on Montparnasse."

Literature in some ways is very much like religion. You either like a certain point of view and accept it unqualifiedly, or you don't like it and there is no use talking about it. The Montaignards will continue to love

their teacher, and the anti-Montaignards will go on detesting him, and when they meet, if they are wise, they will talk about the price of eggs or some other remote subject. But they will leave the *Essais* and their author alone.

Outwardly, as I have already said, Montaigne observed those rules of behaviour and deportment which were the accepted code of his time. He was by no means a revolutionary and he did not see any sense in frontal attacks. If the majority of the people believed in honouring the king and obeying the rules of the Church, he was perfectly willing to accept their verdict and had no intention of making himself conspicuous by going hunting when everybody else happened to be in church or by preaching rebellion when the crowd in the street was loudly hurrying for a visiting member of the royal family.

This, however, did not prevent him from having a great many very definite opinions of his own upon all such subjects as religion and statecraft and the true basis for a happy family life. One may even doubt whether he was at heart a very good son of the Church or even a sincere admirer of the world as he found it—royalty included—for whereas the truly faithful believe and accept without arguing, Montaigne, in everything he ever wrote, was for ever asking himself this very important question, “After all, what do I really know?”

Descartes would have advised Montaigne to believe only that which he could observe with his own eyes, but Descartes had not yet made his appearance, and Montaigne was completely lacking in the ‘scientific approach,’ as we people of the modern world have come to understand that expression. This did not prevent him from becoming one of the world’s greatest specialists in the actions and reactions of the human soul, for in his lonely laboratory he would dissect and study his own and his neighbour’s impulses with the complete detachment of a Vesalius, except that he never went quite as far as the man with the scalpel.

But whereas that famous Flemish anatomist reached a great many definite conclusions, Montaigne, just before he reached the final answer to the question he had posed himself, would come to a stop. His inborn and incurable habit of looking at the world from the angle of his sceptical *Que scai-je?* (“what can I really ever know?”) prevented him from taking definite sides on any question and from dividing the whole of creation too sharply into either white or black. He preferred the intermediary colours and in this he proved that he was a brother under the skin to all other good philosophers from the days of Socrates to William James. They too had come to realize at a certain point in their careers that eternal doubt must be the price of spiritual liberty and that truth, once it has

been accepted and has been elevated to the rank of dogma, can be used to crush its former friends and to establish itself as a tyrant, infinitely more cruel and unrelenting than the tyrants it has just helped to crush.

The doubt of which these prophets spoke had something of the divine about it. It did not consist in asking futile and superficial questions, like over-bright children trying to make the lives of their Sunday-school teachers miserable by asking, "Please, Miss Jones, what is God?" It was a very humble kind of doubt. It was full of reverence before the very subject it happened to doubt. But it was doubt, nevertheless, a wavering of opinion and a fear of coming to definite conclusions before one could be absolutely certain that all the evidence now at last available was in—that somewhere or other beyond the distant mountain ranges the jealous gods were not still hiding a few scraps of the ultimate verities, which they intended to preserve strictly for themselves as being much too good for mere mortals.

Scepticism, as we understand it to-day, is the philosophy which claims that outside the field of science no absolute knowledge is possible and that no fact or truth can be established upon philosophical grounds alone. It therefore preaches the gospel of suspended judgment.

I don't know much about such things (being an artist rather than an historian or a philosopher), but it seems to me that the sceptics who have played a rôle in history have been about as fine a body of men as ever lived and that on the whole they have been more useful in making our world a little more civilized than any other group of spiritual leaders. From the days of Pythagoras until those of Immanuel Kant, they have been distinguished by their moderation and tolerance, their willingness to listen to both sides of every controversy, and their unwillingness to pass harsh judgments upon those who disagreed with them.

And of none of them can this be said more truthfully than of Michel de Montaigne. He accepted life as he found it. He declared that in his eyes it was neither entirely good nor entirely evil, because everything depended upon the way one approached the problems of everyday existence. Just as in the case of Voltaire, his original scepticism was afterwards modified by his conviction that in the end reason would provide a solution for most of our difficulties. Therefore, as Montaigne grew older, he became more and more of a stoic. He did his best to rise superior to both pain and pleasure, but in this he never quite succeeded. He was too essentially healthy in his reactions, too much a product of the fertile soil of France, to set himself as entirely apart from all ordinary human experiences and emotions as the Emperor Marcus Aurelius or the slave Epictetus had tried to do fourteen hundred years before.

At times Montaigne had also interested himself considerably in the ideas of Epicurus, who had taught that pleasure was the only good in this world and should therefore be the end of all our endeavours, but he had too strong a streak of melancholia in his make-up (he himself called it "grouching" rather than "complaining") to find satisfaction in a philosophy which so greatly stressed happiness as the ultimate goal of all human endeavour.

However, I am now doing what should never be done. Programme notes may serve their purpose for the average composers and philosophers, but they can't be written for either a Beethoven or a Montaigne, because these men were much too complicated and too many-sided ever to be reduced to a few simple outlines. Just the same, I ought to make an attempt at it in the case of Montaigne.

By and large, I feel inclined to say that he was the best-balanced human being whom we encounter within the pages of the past. And being so harmoniously balanced, he can be of immense benefit to people like myself who lack that spiritual equilibrium and who are either on top of the mountains or way down in the cellar.

This very virtue (this co-ordination of all his critical faculties) will for ever prevent Montaigne from becoming one of our popular heroes. His talent for discrimination, his love for well-chosen intermediary colours—these will always keep him apart from the majority of his fellow-men who will insist upon the extremes of either all white or all black. But that is unavoidable under our present system.

Progress has always been a question of the few and not of the many. Those who are the leaders realize this and accept their fate. They know that they are condemned to pass a good deal of their time in utter loneliness, but such solitude is unavoidable if they wish to achieve what they have set out to do. No use to bewail their fate. Their reward will consist in the consciousness of having worked for the common good and without any idea of self.

In the year 1565 Montaigne had married a lady by the name of Françoise de la Chassaigne, the daughter of one of his colleagues in the city government of Bordeaux. It had apparently been one of those pre-arranged French matrimonial alliances which (though we greatly disapprove of them in North America) seem to offer a more substantial basis for a lasting companionship than our own system, which is based on that illusory and short-lived attraction which we call romance. The good lady had presented him with a daughter who passed safely through the perils of infancy and whom her father educated according to the best pedagogical precepts of the latter half of the sixteenth century

The mother and daughter were the only two women who played any kind of rôle in his life, with the exception of one other person of the female persuasion, whom I shall mention in a moment.

Montaigne was always held in great esteem at the royal court, and his former Gascon neighbour, Henry of Navarre, was for ever trying to persuade him to return to Paris. Michel declined his Majesty's flattering invitation as regularly as Spinoza was to decline those of an even mightier potentate, the great King Louis XIV of France. Both men were grateful for the honour bestowed upon them, but the one thing they valued more than anything else in this world was their personal freedom. They therefore could not permit themselves to be caught in a position where they might be beholden to some one else for their daily bread and butter.

Henry was intelligent enough not to take offence at his subject's rebuff, while Montaigne from his side gave expression to his feeling of loyalty by an occasional visit to the city of Paris. He would then pay homage to his ruler, but as soon as he could do so without giving offence he would return to his ivory tower.

It was during one of those visits to Paris that Montaigne had made the acquaintance of one of the most famous bluestockings of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—a certain Mademoiselle Marie de Jars de Gournay. Montaigne seems to have been quite impressed by this learned woman and, being old enough to be her father, he adopted her as a sort of honorary daughter, a *fille d'alliance*. He remained in correspondence with her during the rest of his days, and shortly after his death, the lady, duly chaperoned by her mother, travelled all the way to Bordeaux that she might express to Madame de Montaigne her deep regret at the demise of her never-to-be-forgotten husband.

Not only did the widow of the famous man receive Mlle de Jars de Gournay most graciously, but she also presented her with annotated copies of her late husband's works, both in manuscript and in printed form. The faithful adopted daughter, not to be outdone in her devotion to the memory of her adopted father, then set to work to give the world a perfect edition of the famous *Essais*, with all the quotations correctly translated and made ready for public consumption.

As I pointed out a moment ago, Montaigne will never be very popular among our average readers. The essay form which he invented is the favourite literary dish of all true connoisseurs, but mention the word 'essay' to a publisher and he will turn pale, pull his watch out of his pocket, claim that he has got just five minutes in which to catch his train, and that is the last you will see of him until he is definitely informed that you have left the city and have returned to Connecticut. Don't blame the poor man. Essays mean only toil and trouble to all connected with

them, and why deliberately invite a loss of good money when there are so many other forms of literature which the readers are only too eager to buy and which the booksellers will promote as if they were four-leaf clovers at the Donnybrook Fair.

Now that I come to think of it, we should have invited Montaigne to come the same evening as Emerson. Then we could have obtained some vital statistics upon the subject of essay distribution and we also would have been allowed to listen to some rather amusing conversation, for the quick-witted Montaigne would undoubtedly have taken the slower-moving Emerson for a considerable ride. But as this would have been done without any malice, Emerson would never have noticed it, and Montaigne was too good a connoisseur of the human soul not to have realized very quickly that here for once he had struck pure gold and he would have acted accordingly. But it was too late now. There were to be no repeats in the matter of our invitations, and we had to accept whatever was coming, without regrets and without complaint.

Montaigne was the first of our guests to arrive. He explained to us afterwards how he had happened to come by boat. "I hadn't had a chance to revisit the scenes of my childhood days," he said, "until now, and so I made the best of my opportunity. I first of all went to Bordeaux, and imagine my joy when I found that my beloved tower was still standing! In Bordeaux I hired a fishing-smack, not very different either from those we used to own when we were still in the herring business! and after a few false starts and a few days of seasickness and bad food, those good fellows finally landed me on your little island."

I asked Montaigne where his craft would wait for him, but he told me that all that had been taken care of. He apologized for not being more specific and ended his sentence in the way so many of our guests did when they spoke of their present whereabouts. "We know so little and we can say even less."

This invited an answer on my part to show him that I had not only read him but could also quote him *ad lib.*, though this particular quotation was easy enough.

"What you really mean to say, Monsieur de Montaigne, is that you don't know anything at all."

He caught the allusion to his famous motto and smiled. "Yes, I suppose so," he answered. "I am afraid that I shall never be able to live that sentence down. One makes a remark—a mere nothing—a little casual observation such as one probably makes a hundred times a day—and writes it down. The world passes by thousands of other such



MONSIEUR MONTAIGNE ARRIVES IN A FISHING-SMACK



insignificant observations and forgets them, but then one sticks. And for the rest of his days, the poor author must pose as the brilliant sage who asked the immortal question, 'What do I really know?' All the really serious books upon which he has slaved so hard during a lifetime of unending labour are forgotten or have been cut up into packing paper for sausages or cats' meat, but that one commonplace remark goes on for ever."

"*Que vous avez raison, monsieur,*" Erasmus said, who had heard most of this monologue and who now indicated that he would like to be presented.

"*Permettez, Monsieur de Montaigne.* This is Dr Erasmus, the eminent scholar whose works must be familiar to you."

Montaigne eagerly grasped the old Dutchman by both hands. "This is indeed a happy moment! Unfortunately, I was only three years old when you left us, most venerable and erudite Doctor, but had you waited just one more year, I would have been able to read you while you were still present. I have been reading you ever since. I had a great many of your books in my library. And now—what great and good fortune! Now at last I hold the original copy of all this wisdom here in my own hands!"

Carefully, almost tenderly, guiding Erasmus, he led him to the fireside, took the glass of sherry Frits offered him, lifted it, and said, "To the teacher of all of us." To which Erasmus undoubtedly would have replied with one of his elegant little speeches, done in the best of Ciceronian Latin, if only he had been given the chance. But just when he was about to start on his peroration, our house was shaken as if it had been caught in the aftermath of an earthquake. Tiles came rattling down from the roof, and I had grave fears for our windows.

"That must be Leonardo," said Frits, "come back for a little more flying with his little officer. I am sure he landed on our chimney. God help us, there it goes!" and he rushed towards the door, but ere he reached it, it swung wide open, and a terrific voice shouted, "What is the idea of making my master wait? Where are your manners, you *lazzaroni*, you brigands, you blacklegs, you musty, cheese-eating rats?"

Montaigne was delighted. "That sounds familiar," he said. "I know that voice! You do not mean to say that you have perchance asked the good Dr Rabelais to come here to-night and share our meal with us and bring his beloved Gargantua?"

Frits said, yes, he was right. We had indeed invited the Doctor, but not a word had been said about his bringing anyone with him.

"Don't worry. Even if he has, the Doctor will know how to treat that difficult brain-child of his."

True enough! At that very moment we heard the voice of Rabelais, who was in a state of absolute fury and who was apparently berating a third person.

"*Tais-toi, Gargantua,*" we heard him shout. "Keep quiet, you monster, did you hear me? I told you to keep quiet. You have caused me enough trouble as it is. I never knew such a day! You have behaved like a badly spoiled child. I am angry with you. I am very angry with you and I don't like you at all!"

Thereupon there followed an outbreak of such weeping and moaning and wailing as none of us had ever heard, and a sad, woebegone voice begged to be forgiven, protesting that no harm had been intended and that everything had been done in a spirit of good, clean fun.

"I know your good, clean fun, my little cabbage, but you have been a most damnable nuisance. And for that, you cannot come in, but have to stay outside all night long! Besides, this house would not be big enough for you. So go away—leave us in peace—at least for a little while, and don't bother us any more. I gave you a cold boiled ostrich for your supper before we left. Unless you have already eaten it—and I told you not to—it still must be in your knapsack. Take it and eat it. That will quiet your nerves. After that, leave me alone, I say, for the love of God—*leave me alone!*"

"Then you are no longer angry with me, dear master?" the giant whimpered.

"No, I am no longer angry with you, but only if you promise that from now on you will be good. If you give me any more trouble, I shall leave you at home the next time I go out, and I shall take Pantagruel."

"I will be very good," Gargantua humbly promised.

"Then go away! *Fiche-moi le camp!* Disappear!"

"Yes, master."

Rabelais entered and, without bothering to shake hands with any of us or giving us so much as a look, he slumped down upon the nearest chair, rubbed his knees, and said with a gesture of despair, "This is absolutely the last time I shall let that idiot accompany me. Every time he promises me most solemnly that he will be good, and always it is the same story.

"You see, these giants are very faithful. They are not very bright, but they are extremely loyal to their masters. Now it so happened that there were some other giants abroad to-day, and not only giants but dwarfs too, and the dwarfs came upon us in such hordes that they were much more dangerous than the giants. These dwarfs and giants, so I have been told, belong to an Englishman, a certain Meester Sweeft, if I got the name correctly. He lived a century and a half after me, and I think he was a

dean in the English Church—or something they now call the Church of England. When he started writing books he needed those creatures, just as I needed mine when I turned author, and what a lot of trouble I would have saved myself if I had stuck to medicine or religion!

“But those complaints don’t do me any good now. And, after all, I am not the only man of letters who had a right to invent such a Noah’s ark of numps and oafs, and God knows I bear Meester Sweeft no ill will. The more giants, the merrier, and they are badly needed in our world of twerps. Yes, they are very badly needed. But what happens next? Those hulks are perhaps not as intelligent as they should be, and at the same time they are incurably jealous and pathetically loyal to those of us who created them.

“For some reason, my imbecile elephantine children seem to feel that this Meester Sweeft had no right to invent a few giants of his own. I have told them at least a thousand times that I don’t care—that our planet is big enough to hold them all. Does that do any good? It does not! No sooner do my ruffians and those of Meester Sweeft catch sight of each other than there is a battle—a veritable battle of Titans—with Behemoth trying to stick his knife into the eye of Polyphemus while Gog is disembowelling Magog.

“This afternoon, at first, all went wonderfully well. Gargantua, noticing that I was getting a little tired, had picked me up and was carrying me on his shoulder. And then—the Lord only knows where they had been hiding—but suddenly a whole army of Lilliputians—I think that is what they are called—came racing towards us, and they were led by three or four of the largest and toughest Brobdingnagians I have ever seen. The old story—Meester Sweeft’s paper children coming after mine, and with murder in their eyes too!

“As soon as he noticed them, Gargantua got so excited that he dropped me. I assure you, it is no bagatelle to fall all the way down from his shoulder! I can still feel the lump on my head.

“For a moment I thought they would sink the whole of your island, they stamped so hard and shouted and shrieked and bellowed, and the little Lilliputians, that miserable rabble, went straight after me and they were climbing all over my arms and legs, hacking at me with their little swords. When suddenly—*voilà—encore un autre géant!* I had never seen him before. He was as tall as my own Gargantua, but he was dressed quite differently. He looked as if he had been born fifty years ago and he wore high leather boots. He was standing by the side of a canal, chewing a straw and taking it all in as if it were a joke. It may have been a joke to him, but it wasn’t to me, for Gargantua was getting the worst of it, and badly so. One of Meester Sweeft’s giants had my poor Gargantua



THE LILLIPUTIANS AND THE BROBDINGNAGIANS WERE AFTER GARG.

by the scruff of the neck and another had taken out his knife and was trying to cut his throat, and then, suddenly, I saw this new giant bend over the canal near which he was standing, pick up a boat that happened to be sailing past, take aim, and—*bang!*—throw it at that giant of Meester Sweeft who had his dagger at Gargantua's throat. A marvellous shot! That boat hit the Sweeft giant with such force that it cracked his skull, and he fell backwards with a horrible howl of pain, and before he could get back to his feet, I saw my small Gargantua pick him up and throw him clear into the sea that lies on the other side of the dunes.

"That evil fellow must have been the leader of the mob, for the moment he was gone, the miserable pack of hyenas turned heel and ran away as fast as they could. Of course, I rushed right over to the gallant fellow who had just saved our lives. I thanked him and asked him for his name because some day I hoped to be able to repay him for his kindness."

"What was his name?" I asked.

"Alas, monsieur, you know how small a gift we Frenchmen have for foreign names, but it was something like Bunion or Bonnion—it rhymed with *oignon*."

"Could it have been Bunyan?"

"It could."

"And his first name?"

"The first name I remember because it was like that of the Apostle Paul."

"Well," I said to Frits, "our island is picking up. Think of Paul Bunyan having come all the way to Holland!"

"Who is he? I never heard of him."

"No, you wouldn't. But he is one of the heroes of our Far West. He is so big that when he goes walking he—Lord God Almighty! What has happened now?" and I jumped from my chair, for right outside our house there was a noise as if another earthquake had struck our town. Once more chimneys were falling down, beams were creaking and breaking. Walls seemed to be tumbling down, and then there was a sound of church bells being shaken violently as if by a hurricane.

Rabelais was the first to act. "That idiot again! He will never learn," he shouted at us, "but this time I will teach him a lesson. Look what the fool has done now."

He pointed across the market-place. Gargantua was sitting on top of the town hall, leaning contentedly against the tower (hence the noise of the falling bells) and munching away at his boiled ostrich.

"Gargantua," Rabelais commanded, "come down here and come this instant. Come here, I say!"

The giant got up. He looked as sheepish as a small boy who has done



PAUL BUNYAN HAD PICKED UP A BOAT THAT HAPPENED TO BE  
SAILING THROUGH A NEAR-BY CANAL

something he vaguely suspects he should not have done but who is not quite sure what it may have been.

"*Oui, maître,*" he answered, stepping with unusual care over a couple of houses. "I am coming. Right away!"

"Gargantua, give me that plate. Give me your supper."

"But, dear master, I have not had a bite yet. I spent all that time looking for a place to sit down."

"Well, you found it," Rabelais said, looking as mad as a dozen wet hens. "Yes, indeed, you found it all right! And now look at what you have done, you imbecile, you ninny, you oaf, you dunderpate, you kind of an Englishman!"

Gargantua, following his finger, saw the church bells lying all over the market-place and the street. He drooped his head. "I am sorry, master," he said, "but I was hungry and I did not realize."

"No, you never realize. You are always sorry but you never realize. But this time I shall make you realize. Give me your plate."

Gargantua handed him the plate containing his meal. Rabelais took it with both hands and gave it to Hein. "Hide this, if you please, hide it where this creature won't be able to find it. But be careful where you put it. He is very clever when he gets hungry. He becomes almost human."

Gargantua was in tears. "Master," he pleaded, "dear, dear master, you don't mean to say that you are going to let me go hungry?"

"I am. Not a morsel of food until to-morrow morning."

"But, master, my beloved master, I shall die of hunger!"

"I wish to God you had done so long ago. That would have saved me a lot of bother." Then turning to us, "I suppose the cows are no longer in the pastures?"

"Not in November. They are all in their stables."

"Any sheep left loose?"

"None."

"Any goats?"

"We have only a few, and they are all locked up."

"Very well, then he won't be able to do any harm. And it will be good for him to go hungry for a little while. Maybe it will teach him a lesson, and now, messieurs, I must apologize to you once more, and then perhaps you will give me something to eat. I too am so hungry I could almost eat Gargantua. But perhaps first of all you will introduce me to my fellow-guests."

This apparently was to be an evening of surprises. First the incident with Gargantua. But now it was the turn of his master. Rabelais, I noticed, had been casting glances at Erasmus as if he were asking himself,

"Where have I seen that face before? Now, where have I seen that face before?"

No sooner had Frits said, "Dr Rabelais, this is Desiderius Erasmus," than it was the turn of the Frenchman to go through some of the same sorts of antics displayed but a moment before by his pet giant. With much greater agility than one would have expected of a man of his age he threw himself on his knees right before the greatly embarrassed Erasmus. Then he took the old humanist's hands into his own and carried them tenderly to his lips.



RABELAIS GREETES ERASMUS

"My father," he said, "my revered and deeply beloved father, who is also my mother, the one man in the world to whom I owe more than to anybody else. And so at last I am to meet you!" and he actually wept tears of joy.

All this apparently came as a complete surprise to Erasmus.

"It is undoubtedly flattering to my pride," he began, "to find a stranger bestowing such honour and affection upon me, but I fail to see why I deserve this act of homage. Come on, my good sir, sit down. Sit down quietly by my side and tell me why you feel like that about me. A father? Yes, I suppose I might have been some one's father, but a mother? Even by the widest stretch of the imagination, that is carrying things a little too far, isn't it?"

"I know," Rabelais answered, recovering from his outburst of enthusiasm, "but if only you could feel what you have meant to me! I first



discovered some of your works in the library of the du Bellays. They were very much interested in literature and they bought every book that came from the press, and it was there that I met you, and if it had not been for you, I am sure I never would have set pen to paper. It was from your writings that I got my first idea for my own foolish yarns. Afterwards I read everything you published. And if you had been my own father, you could not have been closer to me than you were. And now I can see you and touch you, and this is indeed the happiest day of my life, even if it comes four hundred years after my own death," and so on and so forth, for his admiration for Erasmus knew no bounds, and he might have continued for another hour if it had not been for that most welcome announcement that came from the kitchen: "If you gentlemen will please sit down, I can then serve the soup."

This was the sixteenth of our weekly dinner-parties. We had now entertained a sufficient number of guests to be able to draw a few general conclusions about the degree of their 'interestingness.' The statesmen came away down at the bottom of the ladder. Most of them had been very dull, unless, of course, we called Sir Thomas More a statesman, but he had only dabbled in politics as a side-line. Those born to the purple had been little better. The theologians—well, we had known what to expect and so had not really been very much disappointed. The scientists had been good enough when given a chance to ride their own hobbies. The purely didactic type of mind, too, had not been exactly stimulating. It had been much too self-conscious, too self-centred, to be able to enter into the mode of thinking of others. Confucius might have proved the most interesting of our guests if we had had a chance to talk to him directly and without an interpreter. Some of the professional philosophers had been too much set in their attitude towards the non-philosophers to make good table-companions.

Then who was the ideal type of person with whom to spend an evening?

Most assuredly he was not the expert, but the many-sided amateur, the intelligent dilettante who had been the cultural ideal of the ancient world. After he had been called back into existence by the Renaissance, he had been returned to his former position of honour during the Baroque and had enjoyed another short-lived period of success during the era of the Rococo. But he had been rudely and definitely pushed off the stage the moment the so-called expert had made his appearance. Then the all-round man—the highly talented amateur—had been informed that henceforth there was going to be an end to all his dilly-dallying nonsense and that from that moment on the world belonged to 'the man who really knew.'

How much harm these experts had done to what used to be called a civilized form of living we realized once more during that evening while listening to the talk of Erasmus, Montaigne, and Rabelais. Of these three, Erasmus had been the only one who might have remotely qualified as an expert, for he had been a professional teacher, but only for a short while and not long enough to let his mind become petrified. As soon as he had resigned from his pedagogical duties, he had taken up literature and thereafter had roamed contentedly up and down the slopes of Mount Parnassus, but without any definitely fixed place of abode or any definite purpose. Rabelais had been a theologian and a physician and a private secretary before he became a writer. As for Montaigne, he had done about everything a human being could hope to do. He had been suckled by a peasant woman and had ended his career as the personal friend and trusted counsellor of a king. He had had practical experience within the realm of government and was well versed in all those subtler qualities of life one can only learn from one's women friends. Only after he had tasted of every experience within the reach of mortal man had he settled down to become an author. Therefore, that evening we had with us three out-and-out amateurs or, to use a word that is even less popular in our modern world, we had with us three complete dilettantes. I wish we had been able to make a record of what was said, but we had to observe the rules of our silent agreement. Besides, there was no electricity in Veere, and a recording machine would have been out of the question.

As soon as the first part of the meal was over—a most excellent dinner, by the way, and just the right kind of music for the taste of our guests—we steered the conversation in the general direction of politics and, with the assistance of Erasmus, who seemed to have guessed what we were driving at, finally reached a point where we felt that we could risk a definite question. It was Frits who asked it: “Who will ever give us a formula by which we can hope to live like civilized human beings and not like animals in the jungle?”

Both Rabelais and Erasmus bowed to Montaigne as if to indicate that he was the one to give us our answers. He poured himself another small glass of Châteauneuf and said, “I would, if you don't mind, like to hear some more of that music of the young Austrian you played a little while ago. It was most pleasing and soothing, and I can think better when I am listening to soft music. The habit has probably stuck to me from my childhood days.”

I gave the message to Jo, who relayed it to Hein. We heard the machine being wound up, and then the voice of Elisabeth Schumann came down to us in the familiar *Voi che sapete*. Montaigne smiled and said, “My dear friends, the answer to that question, what is the right formula for

a happy life, was given thousands of years ago. But nobody really wanted to know. It has been repeated ever since and at regular intervals, but nobody ever seems to have cared sufficiently to listen. I have no doubt that a thousand years from now it will be just the same. The answer will always be there, but what use is even the best of remedies, concocted by the most learned of apothecaries, if the patient throws the mixture out of the window and his physician after it?"

We did not say anything to indicate that we would like to hear him elaborate just a little upon that somewhat cryptic statement; we left it to him to go on. After another sip at his Châteauneuf, he did so.

"Suppose we look at it from this angle?" he suggested. "Who rules this world, who created the heavens and the earth, who is the beginning and end of all power, the incarnation of all wisdom?"

"It is God," said Erasmus, crossing himself.

"Amen," said Rabelais, doing likewise.

"Very well. We can all of us agree upon that. The conduct of our universe is in the hands of Him who is best fitted for that high office."

"It is indeed," said Rabelais.

"*Immo vero*," said Erasmus.

"And to whom do we entrust the care of our spiritual affairs?"

"To the Pope," said Rabelais.

"And also a little perhaps to the emperor," said Erasmus, liking his little joke.

"Again I can only agree," said Montaigne. "But now answer me this question: how do this Pope and this emperor come to hold their power?"

"They get elected," said Rabelais.

"I am sorry," said Montaigne. "I sound like a village priest, driving his little peasants through their catechism, and I beg your pardon, but it is the only way I can prove the point I am trying to make. The Pope and the emperor get elected, the same as I got elected when I became mayor of Bordeaux. And who elected me?"

"I don't know how they run such things in your part of the world," Erasmus told him, "but here in the Low Countries the aldermen and the sheriffs would have balloted for you, and if you happened to have got more votes than your rivals you would have been given the office."

"And how did those aldermen and sheriffs come to be installed on the seats of the mighty?"

"Because they were the brightest members of the community," said Erasmus with a great deal of unction in his voice. "I knew many of them well. Some of them could even read and write!"

"Yes," Rabelais added, "and all of them could count and do neat little sums with the ducats piled up in their strong-boxes."

Montaigne let these remarks go by without any comment and continued his inquiry in the same quiet manner in which he had begun. "It is a fine system," he said, "at least from a theoretical point of view. Everybody has always agreed that it was the best system. The other day I read about a Chinese philosopher who seems to have lived hundreds of years before the great Plato, and this is what he said, if my translation is correct: 'Let him who is best qualified be in command of his fellow-men.' Plato, the most learned of all the ancient sages, did likewise. So did Socrates. So did the great Aristotle. So have all the wise men done who since then have given the matter their serious thought. 'Let him who is best qualified be in command.' And what have they actually accomplished?"

"Not very much, I am afraid," said Erasmus.

"That, my honoured master," said Rabelais, "is stating the case very mildly."

Then Frits made bold to enter into the conversation. "If that is so, monsieur," he asked, "then what solution do you offer?"

Montaigne shrugged his shoulders with that gesture to which we were rapidly becoming accustomed. "I don't know," he said. "Except that maybe, like so many other problems in life, there may be no solution at all."

Now Erasmus took the floor, figuratively speaking, for once he was comfortably tucked away in his chair, he would hardly move during the entire evening.

"If you will allow me, Monsieur de Montaigne," he began, "and you, my reverend Doctor, if you will allow me to offer a few observations? I never laid claim to any deep sense of piety, but I tried to be a fairly good Christian and, as long as I lived, I was a faithful son of the Church. And while young I had a certain amount of training as a theologian and so perhaps I can speak with some authority. At least, I shall not be far wrong when I quote from Holy Writ, for I know my Scriptures.

"Monsieur de Montaigne told us that we need not wait for still another political prophet to tell us how we can obtain a reasonable and righteous form of government, and we all agreed with him. That point having been decided, we only need devise a workable and practicable method by which we shall be able to find that man who is best fitted to rule and then give him his chance. The difficulty, as I see it, is not in finding that man, for people of extraordinary ability are so rare that they soon enough attract our attention. But how can we arrange matters in such a way that we can get him elected and do not see his place being taken by some one of infinitely inferior abilities but who, for one reason or another, appeals more to the popular taste?

"And now I want to be a little more serious for a moment than I usually am. Let us forget about politics and statecraft for a moment. Let us

talk about matters of the spirit. Do we need laws to guide us in our actions of the spirit? I hardly think so. Here in this most hospitable house I have had the privilege of meeting that distinguished Chinese statesman whom Monsieur de Montaigne mentioned a moment ago. I have, alas, never read anything he wrote, but I have heard a great deal about an Indian sage who was known to his followers as the Buddha.

"Long before the birth of our blessed Saviour, he seems to have taught unto his disciples that love for their fellow-men must ever be the guiding principle of all their deeds and thoughts. Socrates, certainly one of the wisest of men who ever drew breath, was for ever stressing the necessity of following our daimon, that still, small inner voice we now call our 'conscience,' and which tells us automatically whether a course we intend to follow is right or wrong. Most of the Latin and Greek philosophers whom I know from their works—and whom I know fairly well, if I may say so, from Epictetus to Marcus Aurelius—they too—and practically all of them—stressed that same point—that in order to achieve true happiness in the outside world, we must first of all acquire that inner contentment which comes from the knowledge that we have never deliberately done anything of which we knew that some day we might feel heartily ashamed.

"Even the Romans, steeped in the darkness of their brutal pagan creed, instinctively felt this, as you will remember from Horace's *Integer vitæ, scelerisque purus*—"The man of life upright whose guiltless heart is free from all dishonest deeds"—a poem worthy of being chanted every day in every church of the Christian faith.

"And then came our own blessed Saviour, who taught us, as it is reported by St Matthew the publican, that the greatest of all commandments is this—that we shall love the Lord our God with all our heart and all our soul and all our mind and that furthermore we should love our neighbour as ourself. And now I ask you, my friends, have ever words of greater import been spoken than these—"love thy neighbour as thyself"?"

"Never," said Montaigne.

"Never indeed," said Rabelais.

Frits and I kept quiet. This was getting a little beyond our field of observation.

"Then," Erasmus continued, "is it necessary for us to wait until still another prophet shall appear upon the scene to teach us still better, when all of us know that at the moment these sentences were uttered man reached the highest point in his spiritual and moral development? Haven't we already got the one incomparable compass by which to steer our course through life? Why ask for more or better?"

Erasmus took a sip of that mild Moselle which was his usual evening beverage. He waited a moment before he put his final question. Then

he asked in a low voice, "If all of us are in full agreement upon this subject and if it is as simple as all this then why have we never seriously tried to do just this?"

"Haven't we ever?" Rabelais asked. "Not even for a moment?"

"Undoubtedly, a few people have tried to do so now and then and here and there, but their efforts never lasted very long. And what I meant was this: why, if we are all of us convinced that salvation lies only in that direction, then why have not all of us endeavoured to obey that law everywhere and all the time? What answer have you to this, Monsieur de Montaigne, and you, my other dear friends?"

"Alas," Montaigne replied, "once more I feel obliged to answer that I do not know." As for the rest of us, we said nothing, for there was nothing to say.

At that moment the clock struck a quarter before twelve, and all of us realized that soon we would have to bid each other good-bye. I looked at Frits, and Frits looked at me. It had been another evening of great and good friendship and perfect understanding. We wanted to explore that question a little further, but we feared that it was too late, and Rabelais, who for quite a long time had given signs of increasing nervousness, spoiled all further efforts at conversation by getting up and asking to be permitted to have a peep outside our door.

"It is not raining, my dear Doctor," said Frits, who had just looked at the weather.

"It is not the rain that worries me, but I am afraid that I was perhaps a little too hard on my poor Gargantua. He does mean so well, only—like most giants—he is so incurably stupid. But no one was ever more faithful or more loyal."

With that he opened the door, and there was Gargantua, lying right on the cobblestones with a couple of trees he had torn out of the ground as his pillow. He was not asleep. His eyes were wide open and firmly fixed on the door of Frits' house, very much like those of a Newfoundland dog which has been waiting outside for his master.

"Well, my poor little one," Rabelais said, his voice almost trembling with kindness, "and have you been a good boy after I scolded you?"

"Master, never have I been so good in all my life!"

"And you had nothing to eat or drink all the evening long?"

"I have had nothing to eat. But when I got thirsty, I tried to take a drink out of the harbour. Such horrible stuff! It tasted like brine. It made me choke. So when I saw a little tin cup full of water standing just outside the village, I drank that."

"Good Lord!" said Jo, who had come forward to have a good look at the giant, "so that is why the water in the sink has stopped flowing!"

The fellow must have drunk up our reservoir, and will you tell me how I am to wash my dishes without any water?"

"Let the dishes wait till to-morrow," Frits told her. "They will fix the water-tower soon enough."

"No," said Jo, "our plumber is much too stiff-necked a Calvinist to work on Sunday."

"Then we will send for a few plumbers from Middelburg."

"They are just as bad."

"Then the dishes will just have to stay dirty. Meanwhile, where is Hein? Oh, Hein, have you still got that boiled ostrich or whatever it is?"

"Sure. It was a tough job, but I got it into the cellar just the same. Want it?"

"Yes. Bring it up, will you?"

A moment later Hein was back, dragging the ostrich behind him. Frits turned to Rabelais and said, "Please, my dear Doctor, as a favour to us! We hate to see one of our guests go home hungry. Suppose you forgive your little giant, or let him have at least a drumstick?"

"*Alors!* For this one time," and turning to Gargantua, "*Voilà, mon petit chou-chou.* This kind gentleman has intervened on your behalf. Take your supper and be quick about it, for it is about time for us to leave, though gladly would I stay a few more hours at this delightful Thélème."

In the meantime, Erasmus and Montaigne had been bidding each other a most affectionate farewell. They apparently had enjoyed each other's company most thoroughly. As for Gargantua, it was pathetic to see the way he devoured his food. Nor was he particularly neat about the disposal of the gnawed-off bones. He dropped the greater part of them right into our harbour, where they were found the next day and gave rise to the rumour that the carcass of a whale had been washed up on our shore.

It took the giant exactly four minutes to gulp down his supper. Then he carefully wiped his hands on the roof of Frits' house and announced, "I am ready, master. I am ready any time you want to go."

"Very well," Rabelais told him, "and perhaps Monsieur de Montaigne will give us the pleasure of his company. If I am not mistaken, we are going in the same general direction!"

"I shall be delighted, *mon cher docteur*," Montaigne answered and, after having thanked us for the most agreeable evening he had had these last four hundred years, he allowed Gargantua to pick him up and to deposit him most carefully in one of the pockets of his jacket.

"We shall be quite comfortable in here," Rabelais shouted down to us after he had joined Montaigne, "unless the creature has been picking onions again. He dotes on onions. And now, my little man, let's be on



MONTAIGNE WALKING PAST OUR ANCIENT CHURCH



our way. *Bon soir, messieurs, au revoir*, my beloved father Erasmus. I will make a point of looking you up as soon as you return. A thousand thanks to all of you. Especially to the cook. It was a wonderful evening!"

With that Gargantua began to move. And as he turned the corner of the market, the clock struck the hour of midnight.

We found, to our great surprise, that the candles were still burning. We blew them out, and then I bade everybody a cheerful good-night and went home. While crossing the market-place I noticed that one more tree was missing. Gargantua apparently had felt the need of a walking-stick.

And Now a Rather Strange Combination—EMILY  
DICKINSON and FRÉDÉRIC CHOPIN—But Emily  
Has the Time of Her Life, and Chopin Shows  
Us What Can Be Done with a Minipiano

F RITS," I said next day at lunch, "what do you know about American poetry?"

"Very little. The usual stuff, *Moby Dick* and Walt Whitman."

"Well, *Moby Dick* is not exactly poetry. I don't really know what it is, for I never have been able to get through it. Walt Whitman too is not one of my favourites. But did you ever hear the name of a certain Emily Dickinson?"

"Dickinson? Emily? No, never heard of her."

"You've missed something."

"What's all this leading up to? Do you want to invite the lady for dinner next week?"

"I would love to. Unless you have a better candidate."

Lucie came in from the kitchen. She had been making *sauce rémoulade*, for we were having cold meat, and *sauce rémoulade* was one of her specialities."

"Did I hear you talk about Emily Dickinson?" she asked.

"Yes, you did."

"I know all about her. Don't you remember? You sent me a book about her a few years ago—the last time you were in America. I loved her poems! Strange bits of sound, they were, but entirely original. I liked her immensely!"

"There now!" I said to Frits. "I have found some one who agrees with me! You tell him about Emily, Lucie."

"I don't know that there is much to tell except that she wrote a most fascinating kind of poetry. She never bothered about either rhyme or metre and I don't think you can compare her verse to anything in any other language. But it was fascinating stuff and entirely new. I would love to meet her."

"I have already thought of that," I told Lucie, "and I would arrange it that way if I only knew how to ask you. I am always afraid that if we do something that is not entirely according to the rules—and what are those rules?—we may find that we can't have any more guests. I think that it was understood that only Frits and I were to be present. Of course,

we had that aviator the night of Leonardo, but he could not be helped. He was an accident."

Lucie gave me a pitying look. "Poor man," she said, "can't you see how simple it is? Emily was a very shy creature and, besides, she came from New England. She would never have dreamed of visiting the home of two gentlemen without being duly chaperoned."

"Of course not," said Jimmie, who had never seen a chaperon in all her life.

"Will you come too, James?" Frits asked.

"I am sorry, but it is Noodle's day out and I must stay in. I might stand the female poetess, but you will probably have one of your usual musicians too. No, I had better remain at home and leave the job to Lucie."

And so it was agreed that we would invite Emily Dickinson and that Lucie would be there to play the duenna. That, however, would leave us with only one honest-to-goodness guest, and we had got in the habit of asking several at the same time. It helped with the conversation and it made the party much more cheerful. But who, in the name of all the little Amherst saints, would fit in with Emily? It would be difficult enough to make her feel at her ease with two strange men, but we were, after all, ordinary mortals. Before a famous historical personage who was unknown to her, she would evaporate into nothing at all, so to speak. She would hide in some dark corner of the house and never show herself or open her mouth.

It was Lucie who made the suggestion that seemed most likely to solve our problem.

"That Dickinson girl's poetry is like little scraps of music. Sort of thing Schumann might have written to amuse his friends."

"All right," said Frits. "Then let us invite Schumann."

"God forbid!" Lucie warned. "We would have Clara on our hands and we can do without a jealous wife! But will you let me make a suggestion? I am thinking of some one who often expressed himself in his music *exactly* the way Emily did in her verse."

"Who is that?" Frits asked.

"Chopin," Lucie answered.

"Good for you, Lucie!" we both said. "A marvellous idea! Chopin will fit in better than any other musician."

That evening, shortly after midnight, the names of Emily Dickinson and Frédéric Chopin were duly deposited underneath the lion of the town hall.

To devise a dinner that would at one and the same time satisfy a Pole,

who had lived all his life in Paris and who had always 'enjoyed a delicate constitution,' and the simple and unsophisticated daughter of a New England country lawyer, who probably had never been aware of what she was eating, was rather complicated. It had to be a very neutral meal, but with the help of Jo, whom we found still washing her dishes from the night before, we solved it in a few minutes' time.

On this occasion we should not be obliged to go in for strange, old-fashioned dishes, for the people we had asked were our near-contemporaries, and so a *potage santé* was quite in order, for there was no reason



OUR KITCHEN

why Emily should not like sorrel soup, and it would be good for Chopin's weak chest, as sorrel is supposed to be very healthful for whatever ails you. After that a plain roast chicken with mashed potatoes and cauliflower *à la polonaise* (for the benefit of Chopin) would undoubtedly satisfy both parties. At Jo's suggestion, we added a dish of our everlasting string beans. "Cauliflower is too risky," she warned us. "You know what it does to most people."

"You're telling me!" I answered, and the string beans were duly noted down on Jo's shopping list.

The dessert, too, was easy. Jo promised to make us a good old-fashioned bread-and-butter pudding with a lot of whipped cream. As for wine, Emily was sure to drink only water, and Chopin could finish the case of Châteauneuf that had been left over from the previous Saturday.

Should we have music? There is a problem that always presents itself when you are entertaining musicians, for as a rule they are not only exceedingly positive in their likes and dislikes, but also very outspoken in their criticisms, should anything fail to please them. Emily, we knew,

had not been spoiled as far as music was concerned. She could have heard little that was downright bad, but also very little that was of any particular merit. When she was born in the year 1830 Boston had not yet become the centre of the musical arts it was to be sixty years later.

We therefore could give Emily almost anything she wanted. Provided it was not too loud, she would not object. But what of Chopin? Berlioz was the one composer who was definitely out. Liszt, too, had never found great favour in his eyes, but that may just have been the traditional dislike between a Pole and a Hungarian, rather than a matter of taste.

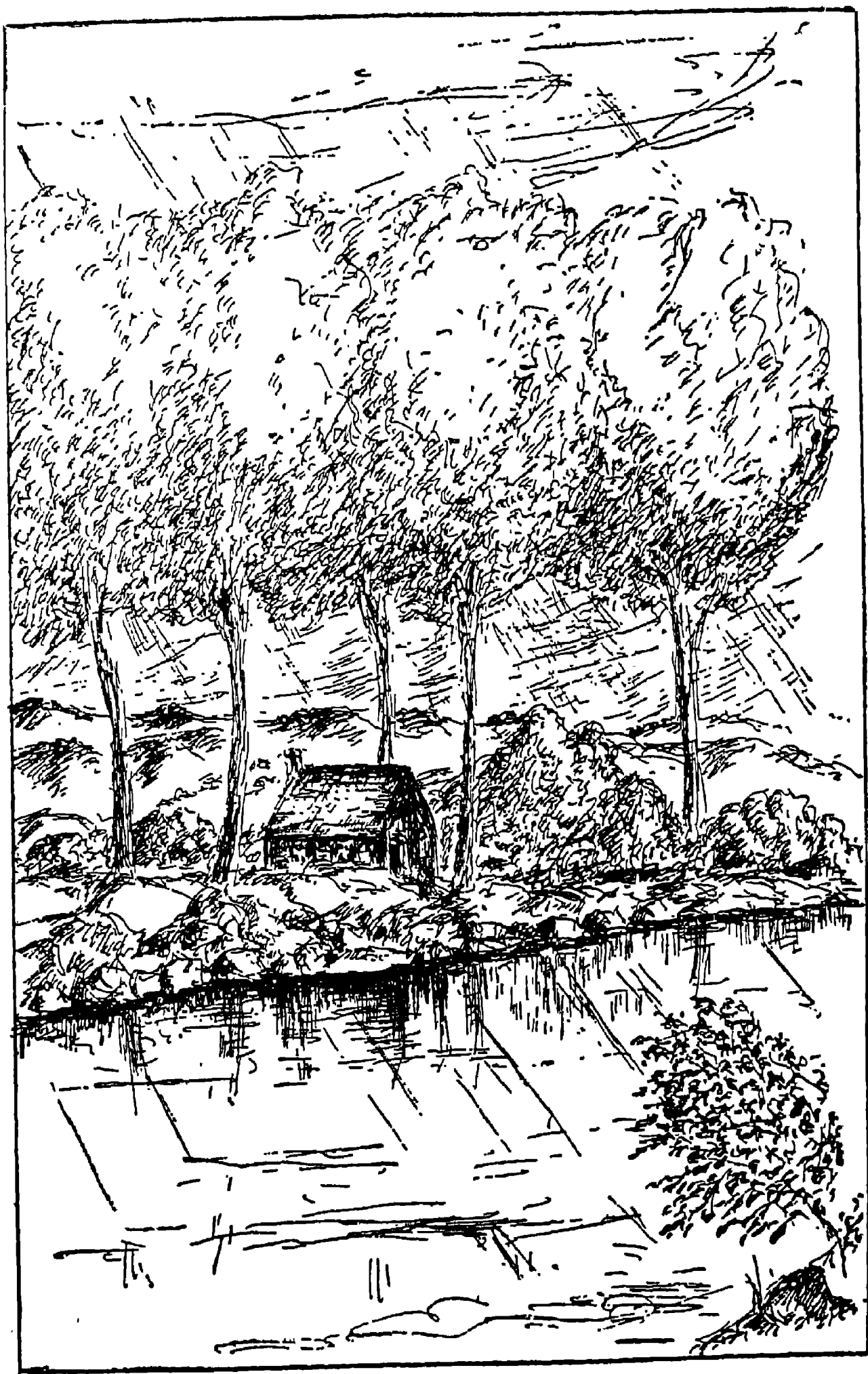
Fortunately, the gramophone companies had recently published a whole lot of Schumann recordings, and we telephoned to Amsterdam for the following list: Schumann's Symphony No. 2 in C major, opus 61, his Concerto in A minor for Piano and Orchestra, opus 54, his *Carnaval*, *Kreisleriana*, and his *Kinderscenen*, in addition to which, we asked for the complete cycle of *Frauenliebe und -Leben*. If that was not sufficient or was not appreciated, there were all our Mozart records, and if Mozart too was not wanted, we now had that minipiano, and Chopin could play whatever he pleased. We felt that all the necessary details had been taken care of, and I could sit down to provide Frits with my report upon our next two visitors.

In the case of Emily Dickinson there was very little to say. Ten or twelve lines would cover the story of her outer life. But what passed through her heart and mind while living in her old Amherst home—that was something else again and something it would be very difficult to write about. But it had to be done, and it was done—after a fashion.

Emily Dickinson's grandfather, Samuel Fowler Dickinson, the descendant of a Puritan immigrant of the vintage of 1630, had been a true man of God and had moved to this remote part of New England in the early twenties, that the world might be made safe for the Congregational faith by means of a college where young men could be prepared for "the conversion of the whole of mankind." A fairly large order—"the conversion of the whole of mankind"—but entirely in keeping with the spiritual ambitions of the America of a century ago.

In due course of time and long before the world was saved, Grandpa Dickinson begot himself a son who was called Edward. This son in due course of time became the father of three children—one boy and two girls. One of these received the name of Emily after her mother, Emily Norcross, and that was our Emily.

The child went through the regular pedagogical routine of her day. When she was old enough to leave home, she was sent to Mary Lyon's "feminine seminary" in South Hadley. It was supposed to be one of the



THE EARLY NEW ENGLAND SETTLERS HAD FOLLOWED THE RIVERS

best schools of the forties of the last century, but Emily was only bored by the institution. The headmistress, according to Emily's letters to her friends, made it her purpose to cramp, curb, and repress every natural impulse and desire in every one of her charges. In Emily the old lady met her Waterloo. When she tried to pit her will against that of that shy and innocent-looking pupil from Amherst, she failed most miserably. Emily did exactly as she pleased, and when Mary Lyon objected, she packed her carpet-bag and went back home.

That was not the way the New England young ladies of that day were supposed to behave, but Emily was an exception. She was her father's favourite and knew that she could wind him round her little finger. She now began to accompany him on many of his professional errands through the surrounding country districts, for he was not only a lawyer but he also functioned as treasurer of the college his father had founded and, besides, he was a cheerful fellow who loved his fellow-men and who was welcomed wherever he went. The witty and—according to her only picture—quite attractive daughter and the dignified father must have made a most pleasing combination. When therefore, in the winter of 1853, Papa was elected to Congress, it was Emily who accompanied him to the national capital.

It was on this occasion that the disaster took place which was to ruin Emily's chance of leading a normal life, but which was to be of such inestimable value to American literature.

While on their way back from Washington the Dickinsons stopped for a few days in Philadelphia. There Emily met a clergyman—a most respectable gentleman with a wife and a child. All those emotions in her which from earliest childhood on had been repressed, curbed, stifled, and cramped suddenly exploded. Such catastrophes have happened before. Indeed, they are said to be as old as the human race itself. As a rule, they do very little damage. They may cause a rather painful detonation and a little puff of smoke, and occasionally, with very bad luck, a pair of pretty eyes may be reddened or a delicate heart will develop a nervous jerk. But when an electric spark is suddenly sent through a charge of dynamite, packed tightly in an old iron box which in turn has been sunk deep into the rock of duty, then everybody had better get out from under, for no one can foretell the havoc that may be caused and how much of the countryside will be turned into a shambles.

When she returned to Amherst after having met her 'fate' (as people used to say then), Emily's life, as far as she was concerned, was over, and at the age of twenty-four Emily Dickinson withdrew from a world in which, as she had discovered, a woman could suddenly be placed before the choice of either ruining a sister's chance at happiness or surrendering

her own hope for a perfect union. That, at least, is the official and accepted version of the incident which fits in most beautifully with the novels about queer spinsters in ungainly calico dresses who never again were seen by anybody "after Ebenezer had left the farm to marry that city gal." (Lucky Ebenezer!)

I have no more—and certainly no better—information upon the subject than anyone else. But from the secret testimony of Emily's own poems, I would come to a somewhat different conclusion. I once discovered a curious religious institution in a remote part of the Austrian Alps. I never got inside, of course, but I derived my knowledge from a woman who had visited it. She told me that all the inmates of this nunnery, the moment they took their vows, were presented with a small doll, a regular child-Jesus doll, which thereafter they could dress and wash and array in the finest garments that could be bought in the Vienna silk-shops. The nuns themselves were never seen again, for, being supposed to be completely happy where they were, there was no reason why they should ever return to the wicked world that lay outside. But some of their dolls were preserved in a small museum in the near-by village, and these were shown to the public.

To Emily Dickinson her poetry was such a child-Jesus doll. She was so bright and understood herself so well that she must have known how totally unfit she was for the business of living a normal life in the community into which she had been born. For generations the girls of her class had been brought up to believe in something which they called (if ever they dared to speak about it at all) "a pure passion." They might as well have gone in search of a heatless flame.

It is true that flames can cease to give out heat, but only after they have been extinguished. Most women of Emily's social antecedents humbly accepted their fate because their ministers and the Good Book had taught them that the rôle they were supposed to play in the scheme of things had thus been ordained by God, and who were they to question the wisdom of the Almighty? Emily Dickinson's relations towards her God were rather particular. They included the right on her part to ask whatever embarrassing questions she meant to put up to Him, and if the good Lord did not come forward with a prompt and satisfactory reply, she herself meant to supply it.

By birth and breeding Emily was a life member of the Pure Passion League and she knew that she would never be able to escape from her own background. Being also a very great artist and therefore insisting upon perfection, she refused to engage in any kind of activity at which she would never be able to excel. If this were so, would it not be much wiser and much pleasanter to spend one's days as a highly amused spectator



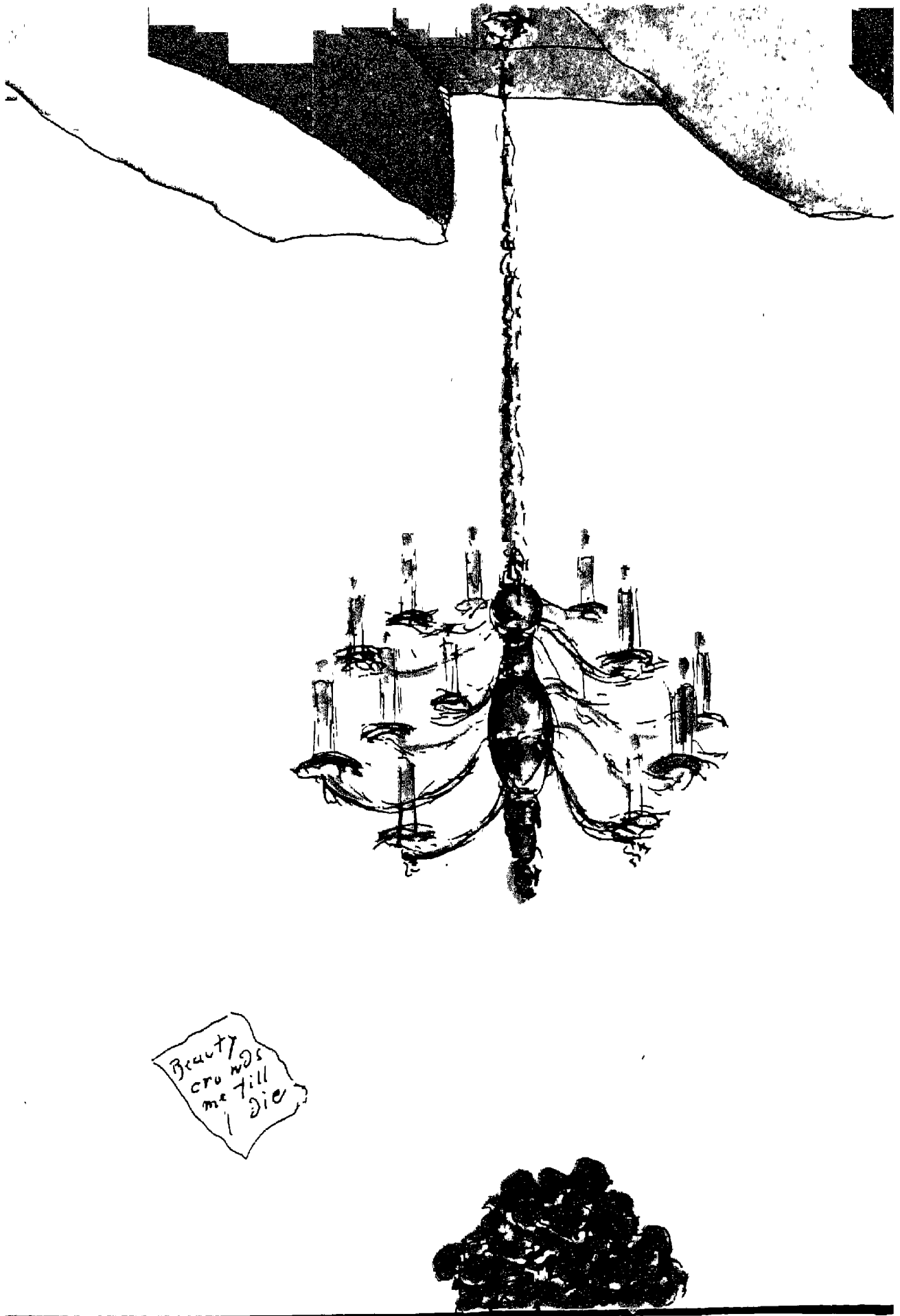
of life, peeping through carefully drawn curtains at the strange antics of one's relatives and neighbours, rather than marry a young professor or clergyman and run the risk of once more being tempted by visions of things that could never be?

Her two fatal meetings with her handsome dominie from Philadelphia made her see all this very clearly. Her strong sense of duty and her gift of detecting the ludicrous in her fellow-men, but most of all in herself, prevented her from going in for dramatics or from doing anything that would make her look conspicuous and therefore silly. Gradually she spent more and more of her time in her own room, until at last she fully withdrew from life and was never again seen by any other human being. Sometimes at night she would leave her virginal chamber to water her beloved flowers in the garden around the paternal home. But from the year 1862 until the hour of her death—May 16, 1886—she worked hard at building up her favourite myth about the silent little woman in white, whose shadowy figure was sometimes observed by a frightened visitor as it hastily fled from the parlour or the kitchen to find safety in her nun's cell upstairs, where she would then spend a delightful evening with her favourite doll, which in her case consisted of tiny bits of verse written down upon tiny bits of paper held neatly together by gaily coloured ribbons and carefully stacked away in the drawers of her chaste little writing-desk.

I may, of course, be entirely mistaken, but I feel inclined to believe that Emily Dickinson in her own queer way got infinitely more out of existence than almost all her contemporaries who lived normal lives. Being in her unobtrusive manner a completely selfish creature, it was not a sense of inferiority that made her insist that after her death all her poems and letters should be burned. Far from it! She had had a marvellous time writing them and felt no need to share her pleasure with others. Let the others wonder and guess. It would be good for their souls, and Emily, in spite of her severe New England exterior, was at heart a good deal of an imp. She loved her little jokes.

Fortunately, her relatives, being people of common sense, understood that they would be committing a sin against literature if they were to destroy so perfect a work of art as the poetry of their departed sister and cousin. It would have been like sneaking into Rembrandt's studio, a few minutes after that melancholy master had expired, and tearing up all his pictures and etchings.

The Dickinson family surrendered most of Emily's private correspondence to the flames of the parlour stove, but they tenderly preserved the neatly tied bundles of her poems and afterwards they had them printed and made available to the public at large, or rather to that part of the public capable of understanding them.



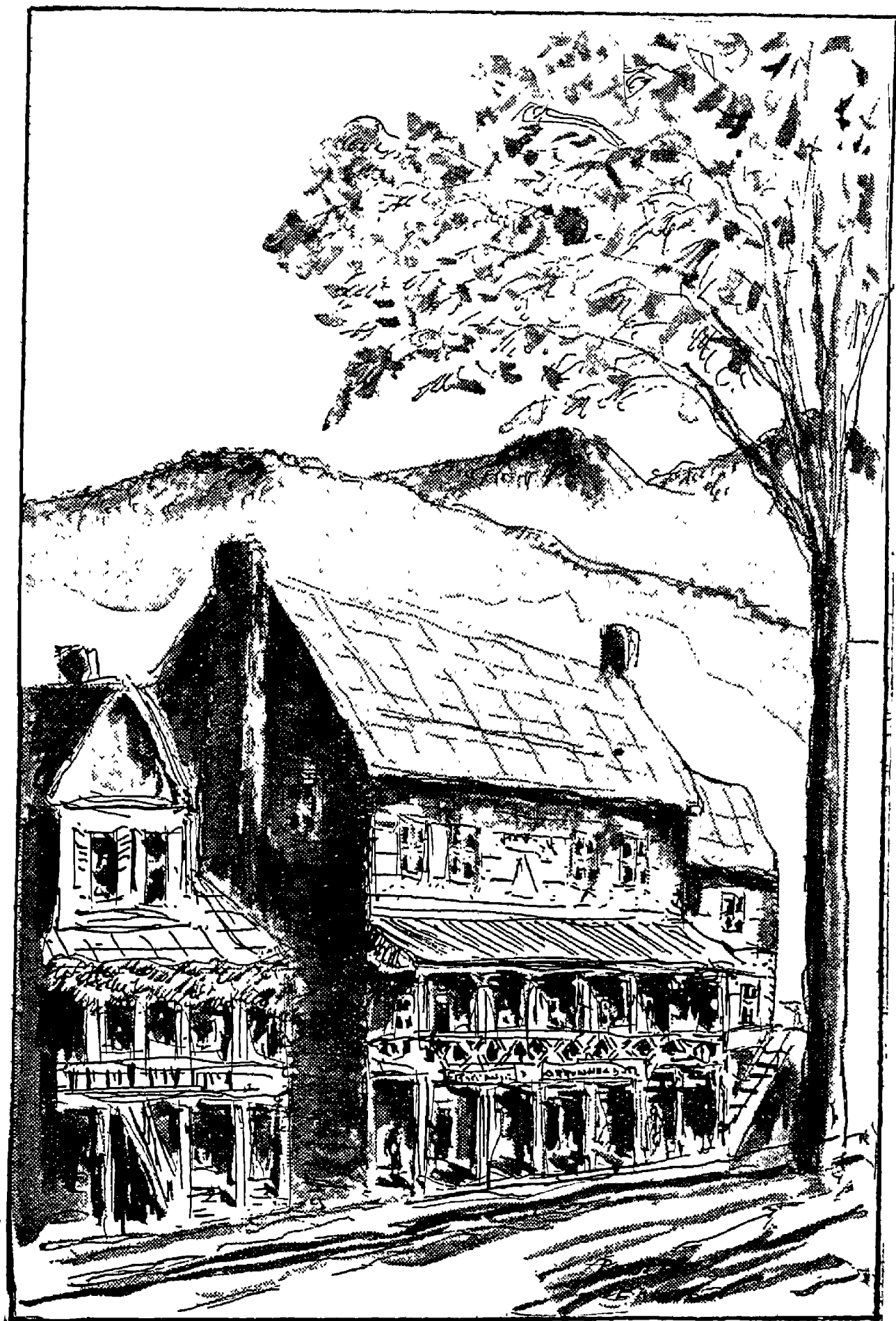
A BIT OF PAPER HAD COME DOWN THROUGH A CRACK  
IN THE CEILING

[See page 558]



THE SINT NIKOLAAS PARTY WAS IN FULL SWING

[See page 574]



A QUIET COUNTRY INN SOMEWHERE IN MASSACHUSETTS

On Thursday, immediately after he received this letter, Frits telephoned me from Amsterdam. "Listen," he said, "according to what you have written about this Dickinson girl, she'll never come. She'll be much too shy."

"Don't worry," I told him, "she'll be there, and if Lucie is going to be there too, she will make a grab for Chopin before Lucie can get him. And Lucie, as you know, is no amateur when it comes to the favourite female sport of 'Catch them as you can.' I think we are going to have one of the most interesting evenings we have ever had. It will be a noble contest, and Chopin may wish he had his Mme Sand—his Lucrezia—with him to protect him from these two wild women."

Here follows my private report on our musical guest.

Frédéric Chopin got his French name from his father, Nicolas Chopin. This energetic young man from the city of Nancy, despairing of ever making a decent living in his native land, had gone east in the year 1788 and had found employment in Poland as a wheelwright. A short time afterwards Thaddeus Kosciuszko, having learned the trade of arms while serving under General George Washington in America, had tried to bring the blessings of liberty unto his own unfortunate countrymen. Nicolas Chopin had joined him, had fought with him, and had ended his military career as a captain in the Polish revolutionary forces.

After the rebellion had been repressed it was quite certain that for a long time to come there would be no further roads built by the Russian conquerors, and the wheelwright business having therefore come to an end, Captain Nicolas Chopin had looked for a new way of keeping himself alive.

That proved comparatively easy for a young Frenchman of pleasant address and genteel manners, for every noble Polish family needed a private tutor that its children might learn to express themselves in the language which meant an open-sesame to the civilized world of the West. Hence we soon find Nicolas teaching his own beautiful tongue to the sons and daughters of the Count and Countess Skarbek and marrying the Countess's lady's maid. This young woman, Justina Krzyzanowska, was the daughter of an impoverished Polish nobleman, and most likely it is from her that Chopin inherited the dash and force and glamour of that unfortunate race which has never yet failed to fight most valiantly for every lost cause.

Having taught the young Skarbeks all they needed to know to be an ornament to polite Warsaw society, Nicolas Chopin moved on to Warsaw, became a professor of French, and was able until the day of his death in the year 1844 to maintain his wife and four children in a state of decent if modest comfort.

As he departed this life only five years ahead of his son, Nicolas also had the satisfaction of knowing that he had begotten a genius. For Chopin's life, in spite of a great many difficulties, was on the whole a very successful one. This may have been due to two causes.

Frédéric Chopin was undoubtedly the greatest composer for the pianoforte the world had seen. But other artists, painters, composers, and architects have been equally prominent within their own fields of endeavour, yet have died in the same poverty in which they had been condemned to live. It is not difficult to guess the reason for their failure. They had missed out on two qualifications which had set Chopin apart from the rest of his colleagues. In the first place, he was the only genius produced by the Polish race while it was struggling for its existence as an independent nation, and in the second place, he had a unique chance of standing forth as the living symbol of a lost cause.

The other musicians who did not fare as well as he did were Austrians among other Austrians or Italians among other Italians or Dutchmen among the usual run of the Dutch. They could never hope to become the embodiment of all that was glamorous and heroic among a people in exile. By this I do not mean to detract one single F sharp from the assembled works of this unequalled teller of musical tales. I owe him as much of a debt of gratitude as anyone else who in moments of desperation has found consolation in listening to one of Frédéric Chopin's nocturnes. But without their lost cause and the opportunity to impress themselves upon the rest of the world as the incarnation of all the hopes and aspirations of a nation which had the sympathy and admiration of every civilized human being, neither Frédéric Chopin nor our beloved friend, Ignace Paderewski, would ever have attained those heights of fame they finally attained. Peace be to their ashes, and may they soon find a worthy successor to inspire the rest of us with a love for that utterly adorable, if at times completely exasperating, people known as the Poles.

There is very little sense in my repeating here the outstanding facts in Chopin's musical career. You can find them in every encyclopedia, and they are very simple. The boy played the piano before he could read and write. That piano, by the way, was used for kindling-wood by the Cossacks when they suppressed the Polish revolution of 1863, for that was the way in which the Russian usurpers usually gave expression to their interest in the cultural achievements of their subject races. At the age of six little Frédéric began to compose. His father not only recognized his son's uncanny abilities but he refrained from doing what so many other fathers in similar circumstances have done. He did not exploit his offspring as a musical prodigy, but neither did he threaten to break every bone in his body unless he gave up the idea of becoming a famous piano

thumper and prepared himself for a more practical career, such as that of a book-keeper or a Government official with the expectation of a pension at the age of sixty. (I am giving you an offhand quotation from one of the letters of Schubert's father to his son Franz.) He quietly but effectively encouraged his son in his aspirations and throughout his life he helped him as much as his modest circumstances allowed him to do.

It is true that the boy gave his first public concert at the age of eight, but that was not done for mercenary purposes. It had been arranged that he might bask in the admiration of the beautiful ladies of Warsaw. Chopin, all through his life, would love to do that sort of basking. When the time had come for him to be trained seriously in the rudiments of his craft (I mean music, not basking), he was sent to the best local teachers of the Polish capital and afterwards to those in Vienna. Some of these, it appears, were not quite as good as they might have been, and it was due to their faulty methods that Chopin, during the whole of his amazing career, was never able to overcome that technical awkwardness which finally made him decide to withdraw from the concert platform altogether and devote himself exclusively to the business of composing.

While in Vienna he had heard some of the greatest performers of his day, notably Hummel and Paganini. Like every other young artist, he felt convinced, after listening to that sort of playing, that he could do equally well, and for a time it looked like that. He had what it took to attract the crowd, especially the female part of the audience. But apart from a technique which never approached that of Liszt and many of the other great performers of that day, he was also lacking in that physical endurance which is absolutely essential for a concert virtuoso or an operatic prima donna. Chopin was like a brilliant ball-player who begins to show signs of collapse after the seventh innings, and it is the seventh innings that counts.

Then came a series of disasters over which he had no control, but which were to have a far-reaching influence upon his subsequent career. Chopin happened to be in Vienna in the year 1830, when another ill-fated revolution broke out in Poland. He was cut off from his family in Warsaw. He never expected to see them again. He decided to go to England and from there to America to begin a new life. In Stuttgart in September of the year 1831 he heard the news of the fall of Warsaw and the beginning of those wholesale executions with which the old régime of Russia used to 'pacify' its most recent territorial acquisitions.

In a state of complete despondency Chopin travelled by slow stages to Paris, but there he gained new courage, for he was welcomed as a conquering hero. The French, still smarting under the defeat of 1812, hated the Russians, and furthermore, Paris had 'gone romantic' in a big way.

Chopin's music completely answered the needs of the concert-going audiences while his Polish passport opened the doors of all the most worthwhile homes of the capital.

In Poland events took their normal course. Russian gallows were being erected at all cross-roads, and the Polish insurgents were in full flight. Soon Paris was chock-full of refugees. Most of them were as poor as church mice and lived in the slums. But a few of the great feudal families had anticipated what was going to happen and had carefully provided for the day when they could no longer dwell on their ancestral estates. They now used Paris as the centre from which to prepare their counter-attack. Being well aware of the value of publicity, they meant to use every possible opportunity to prove to the world that as a race the Poles were infinitely more cultured than their Russian oppressors.

Overnight young Chopin had become exhibit No. 1 of Polish civilization. Rarely has any artist or author (and you cannot start a successful counter-revolution without either) lived up quite so magnificently and so satisfactorily to what was expected of him—or quite so easily and naturally. For Chopin at that time had all the necessary qualifications to become a popular idol. He was young and very good-looking, but in a delicate sort of way, so that people instinctively felt sorry for the poor boy whose shoulders were already bowed down with grief over the fate of his unhappy fatherland. And when he played one of his own compositions and was so deeply moved by the music that he had to ask some one else to finish it for him—then the tragedy of Poland ceased to be merely something the people had read about in their newspapers. Then it became so real that those in the audience felt like taking up their muskets and rushing to the defence of their beloved Polish friends. But ere they could do this, the jubilant strains of a mazurka or a waltz had broken through the gloom that had settled down upon the hall, and everybody went home feeling that the cause of Polish freedom was not yet lost, that it never could be lost, that Poland would arise once more in all its ancient glory.

It was long before propaganda in the modern sense of the word had been invented. But Chopin and his music were the best propaganda a desperately outraged patriotism ever had. I wish to God he would come back to us now!

Of course, as the years went by and nothing happened and the world (which has such a very short memory) began to forget the bestialities of the Romanovs in Poland and wherever else they set foot and the bestialities of the Habsburgs in Italy and all the other bestialities which, these last two hundred years, have been an unavoidable part of what Europe used to call its "foreign policies," Poland too began to bore people and next it dropped out of their minds altogether. Not that this affected Chopin



in his artistic career, for he continued to be the most sought-after piano teacher in Paris, and his compositions were published the moment he finished them. But the atmosphere around him was gradually changing, and although he was undoubtedly the most distinguished Pole of his time, when he, a mere pianist, aspired to marry the sister of a boyhood friend, the Countess Marie Wodzinska, her esteemed papa, old Count Wodzinski, let him understand (and in very plain terms, too) that such a match was absolutely out of the question. What with this annoyance and a few others, Chopin once more contemplated that step which he had already wanted to take in the year 1831—emigrating to America.

His family, his friends, the Polish colony in Paris, his public, and his creditors—they all went down on their knees to prevent him from taking such a dreadful step, which they considered to be the equivalent of a social and musical suicide. Such appeals are, of course, very flattering, and Chopin let himself be easily persuaded to remain where he was, and more is the pity! For it was in Paris that Frédéric Chopin now met with a fate infinitely worse than falling into the hands of the ferocious redskins of the Far West or the managers of the East.

In what I am about to say, I may seem to be a bit harsh on a distinguished colleague who wrote no fewer than a hundred books. But she really was pretty bad. She was pretty bad because, like certain members of the insect family, this female invariably devoured her males the moment they had surrendered to her charms.

A great many columns have been written upon the subject of Amandine Lucile Aurore, Baroness Dudevant. After she had spent three years in an English nunnery, had survived matrimony with the Baron Dudevant, and had achieved motherhood, she had been obliged to find some means of support for herself and her two angel children and had thereupon decided to try her hand at professional journalism and popular fiction. Being a bright lass and suffering from very little competition (in those days ladies did not yet write for a living), she had a lot of leisure for her favourite amatory pursuits. Then one day she met Chopin, and he was hers.

He was at that moment a very sick man. The first symptoms of tuberculosis had just announced themselves. The cause of his beloved Poland was lost. His career as a public performer, so he felt, had come to an end. He badly needed a mother, and George Sand offered to take her place.

I shall lightly skip over that incredible voyage to Majorca, whither Amandine Lucile Aurore took both Frédéric and her ailing son, that the mild climate of this Mediterranean island should cure both of them of their bothersome pulmonary afflictions. Majorca sounded very romantic while you still talked about it in the Rue Pigalle. But after you had

disembarked at La Palma, it was Spain, and Spain at its worst, and you were right back in the Middle Ages. There was no hotel in the Majorcan capital. There were no apartments. There was no food fit for human beings, especially those accustomed to the cuisine of Paris. And everywhere you were hounded by suspicious officials. When you sent to Paris for your piano (for her dear Frédéric must go on with his work and must write even more beautiful things than before) it took the customs people six months to allow it to pass. Why should anyone in Majorca want a piano? It looked queer. It smacked of revolution. And when you fell sick and coughed your head off, there was no doctor on the island, but the officials, suspecting that you might have caught some queer kind of pestilence, forced you to leave the city and to withdraw to a home in the country, miles away from everywhere, in an old and damp monastery, where you added bronchitis to your other troubles and almost died of them.

Chopin, however, must have been tougher than he looked. He not only survived Majorca, but also the tender care of his Lucrezia, and he returned to Paris and lived for a good many years to come.

On the whole, these last ones were not very happy. Paris was rushing from one revolution to the next. News from Poland grew increasingly bad. And in those circumstances teaching—even at twenty francs a lesson (an unheard-of price in those days)—was apt to become an intolerable labour. Besides, that bronchitis of Majorca seemed to have come to stay. Chopin was beginning to lose a good deal of blood and often he was so weak that he could hardly move. But he needed money and, like Paderewski in his last days, he painfully dragged himself to his piano-stool, that he might make a few more pennies to pay other people's debts and help his poor country, but most of all that he might continue to live up to his reputation of being a really *grand seigneur* who never turned down a request for some slight assistance on the part of a fellow-patriot and who would have starved to death before he confessed that he himself had not had anything to eat during the last three days.

Chopin died on October 17 of the year 1849. At his funeral, Mozart's Requiem was played, together with his own Funeral March from the Sonata in B flat minor and, after that, two of his preludes, the E minor and the B minor. A silver goblet, filled with earth from his beloved fatherland, given him by his friends when he left Poland for good in the year 1830, descended with him into the grave, together with the withered rose Marie Wodzinska had given him when she still hoped that her father might relent and would allow him to marry her.

To-day all the actors in this drama are dead and gone. Nothing remains

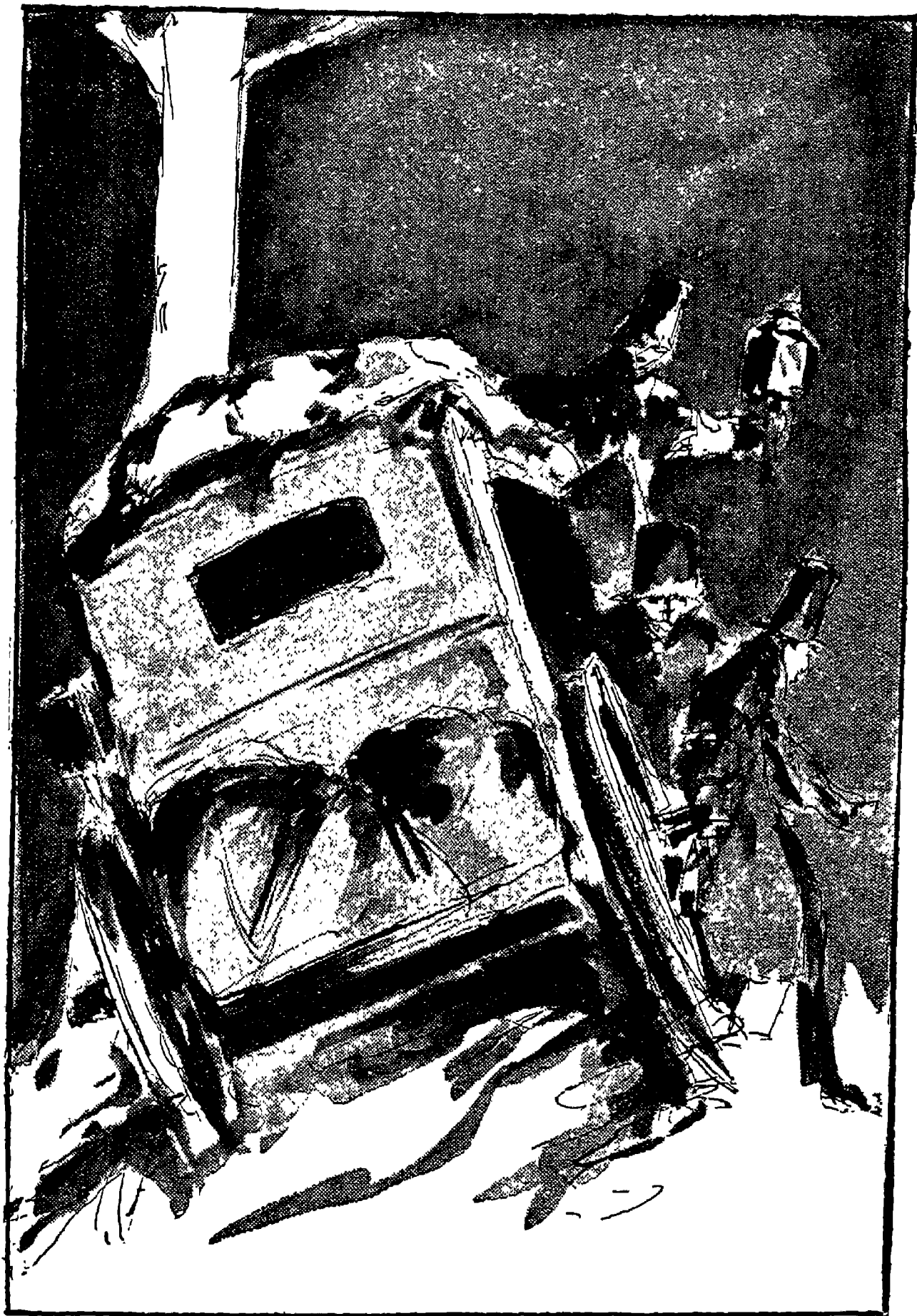
of either the oppressors or the oppressed. The Romanovs, who drove Chopin into his exile, are dead, but they did not have such an impressive funeral, and Polish soil proved more merciful than Bolshevik quicklime. And to be remembered as the man who wrote the Nocturne in E flat major and the Mazurka in A minor is a happier fate than to survive in people's memories as the despot of the gallows and the knout. I, who am old enough to have seen the merry Cossacks do the bidding of their unspeakable masters, who have lived through those agonizing days when there still was hope for my Polish friends, I here and now offer a heartfelt prayer for the souls of those departed tyrants who destroyed all that was lovely and charming in the fair land of Poland: "May their names be for ever cursed!" And the same goes for all their successors, in every part of the world, and in all eternity, amen.

Suddenly winter was upon us. And, quite contrary to a Dutch November (which is usually very wet), it snowed for three days and nights, until the whole countryside lay buried underneath a heavy blanket of white. That, by the way, was the time when our island was at its loveliest and when Veere became almost unbearable in its beauty. The kids were having a wonderful time with their little sleds, and I hoped that Emily would not forget to put on her arctics. But as she was a good New England girl, I knew that she would remember.

Frits had returned from Amsterdam on the mail train to Flushing, and Jimmie had called for him. Jo had reported that everything in the kitchen was under control, and after another day of revising my *Rembrandt*, I felt that a few lungfuls of fresh air were the thing I needed if I wanted to get through the evening without falling asleep.

As usual when the weather was bad, I walked in the direction of Middelburg. After I had crossed the moat which Napoleon had bestowed upon us a hundred-odd years before I noticed a dark group by the side of the road and not very far away. Some one was holding up a lantern, and by its light I could see what had happened. An old-fashioned travelling-coach had almost slipped into the ditch, but at the last moment it had been caught by a tree, and out of the door on the right which still could be opened, a thin man, dressed in the costume of the eighteen-forties, was now being assisted to the street by the coachman, while some one else, who was apparently his valet, was holding up a lantern which threw its feeble rays upon the scene.

From his pictures I recognized the traveller as one of our two guests of the evening. It was Frédéric Chopin. I hastened forward and told him who I was and added the by-now-usual fib that I had walked down the road in the hope of meeting him. He was quite as good a liar as I, for he



IT WAS CHOPIN WHO WAS COMING OUT OF THE BROKEN  
TRAVELLING-COACH

told me that he had half expected that some one would come and show him the way to our house.

When we reached Frits' place we found considerable excitement, for Jo had to report a curious adventure.

"It was this way," she explained, after I had presented Frits to Chopin. "I was getting the things ready for my pudding, the dinner was on the stove, and I suppose it must have been about half-past six, when suddenly quite an old and rather stout gentleman entered. I thought it must be the piano player about whom you had told me and so I said, 'Monsieur Chopin—that is to say, if you are Mynheer Chopin—won't you sit down and make yourself at home and in a moment Mynheer Frits will be here. Meanwhile I will get you a glass of sherry, or would you rather have port—for it is a cold night and you must be tired?'"

"My French is, of course, not so very good, but I thought he would be able to understand me. But he only smiled and said, 'And so you mistake me for Frédéric Chopin! Ah, my dear woman, I love you for that, but, alas, I am merely the cook, so show me the kitchen, and I will set to work.' Well, no cook likes to be pushed out of her own kitchen by somebody who has just walked into the house, and so I answered—and I don't suppose that I was any too friendly about it—that no matter who he was, he could not touch my stove, but if he cared to take a chair in the kitchen and wanted to wait until Mynheer Frits came back, he was welcome, but he must not touch my things.

"Well, all this time I was hoping that Mynheer Frits would come back, as I didn't quite know how to handle this stranger. He might, of course, be the famous French chef he claimed to be, but he did not look the part. He looked much more like a musician—sort of wild and none too neat. And then, just when I was getting ready to go into the kitchen and see that he kept his fingers out of my pots and pans, something else happened, and that was even worse.

"The front door suddenly opened and I said to myself, 'Thank God, there is Mynheer Frits now!' but it was a young woman, all bundled up in shawls and scarves and with a funny-looking fur cap. Fortunately, Mrs van Dam arrived at the same moment as the old doctor, and I thought that between them they would be able to take care of the girl in the fur cap. But not a chance! For when Mrs van Dam held out her hand and said how happy she was to meet some one of whom she had heard so much and whose work she admired so much (you know how Mrs Lucie is, once she gets started on that line), the girl in the cap gave her a pretty ugly look and said, 'My dear madam, I am here because I can't help myself, but please don't think for a moment that I came out of my own free will. However, there is no power on earth can force me to stay in

this room and meet a lot of strangers. I shall go upstairs—I saw a light there, and there must be some place where I can sit. You can bring me my supper up there and I shall need very little, for I am not at all well and now I bid you a good-evening.’ And before we could stop her, she was gone—lickety-split—up the stairs, two at a time, as if some one had been chasing her. Then we heard her turn the key of your door and also heard her laugh a little, and after that, not another sound.”

At that moment Frits finally arrived. He had been obliged to go to the post-office to mail a special-delivery letter, and that was how he had missed all the excitement. “Never mind,” he said, “the rest of us are here, and if Emily feels that way about it, she can have her supper upstairs, and we shall have just as good a time. So won’t you please take a chair—all of you—until Jo is ready?”

“Yes,” said Jo, pointing to her kitchen, “but how about the fellow in there?” and then, catching a glimpse of her stove, she used a well-known Dutch expression no Dutch woman is ever supposed to use and cried out, “Didn’t I tell you! The creature is actually stirring up my gravy!”

This seemed to be carrying things a little too far for a stranger who had not even been invited, and Frits, waxing a bit hot under the collar, shouted out, “*Eh, vous lâ-bas, monsieur!* What are you doing?”

The fellow in front of the fire turned around sharply, then recognized our guest, threw both his arms around him, and joyfully called him by his name. “*Frédéric, mon cher Frédéric! O, que c’est bon de te revoir. Tu vas bien?*” and Chopin, dropping his serious mien, cried back, “Well, of all people! Dear Papa Rossini! Imagine meeting you again after all these many years!”

Thereupon the two men, the older and the younger one, once more embraced each other most affectionately, until Chopin remembered where he was and, turning around, said, “My unknown hosts, this is my dearly beloved friend Signor Gioacchino Rossini, and a very great artist he is, too.”

“You mean he was, my dear Frédéric,” Rossini answered, “but before we do anything else, let me explain why I am here. I am, I assure you, not in the habit of going to places where I have not been invited. Therefore, I am not here as your guest and I shall not enter your dining-room, even if you should ask me to do so. I came here because I had to.

“You see, we sometimes hear about certain things that are happening in the world of the living. When I was told that old Johann Sebastian had been entertained by you, I felt very sorry that I had not been here too, for I had always wanted to meet him surrounded by his sons, some of whom, I am afraid, have gone to the other place. A little later, Herr van Beethoven complained that he had left his hat and a very valuable

manuscript behind at a dinner-party, and the description he gave me of your home made it clear to me that he too had paid a visit to this charming village.

"Imagine my grief! Here I had had a chance to cook for old Johann Sebastian, whom I revere as if he were God Almighty Himself, and for Beethoven, his greatest disciple! And I had spent both evenings playing backgammon with Olympe! She is a good girl, but she will never learn to play backgammon as well as she does certain other things. And then some one whispered something about Frédéric too having been invited to the same place as Johann Sebastian and old Ludwig. That was too much for me. I walked out with a batch of souls that had just been weighed and had been found wanting. I had a devil of a time getting here, for I would not take a train. I had ridden in one of those contraptions once, and believe me, once was enough, at least for me! And now, if you will kindly explain all this to this charming lady—and what a becoming costume she wears!—I am sure Olympe would want a bodice like that if she knew where to get it—but will you please explain to *madame la cuisinière* that I shall not be the least little bit in her way? I just want to add a few of my own little touches to her gravy, and I think that even she"—with another deep bow to Jo—"will agree that while Gioacchino Rossini may not have been much good as a composer, he did know how to prepare a sauce!"

Of course, after that speech, Jo could no longer bear any resentment. And the upshot of it all was that we persuaded Rossini to take Emily Dickinson's empty place. Jo told him she would call him when it was time to start on his sauce, and all of us sat down and had as pleasant a time as on any previous occasion.

We had not forgotten Emily, but we behaved as if we were not even conscious of her being on the premises, and I explained the situation to Rossini and Chopin and told them that our invisible guest was somewhat of an eccentric who, after an unhappy love affair, had vowed that she would never again come in contact with the human race, except a few of her own relatives.

Rossini looked at me with his mouth wide open. "And all that on account of one teeny-weeny little love affair? Ha-ha-ha! I must tell Olympe! She will die laughing."

"Lucrezia would write a dozen books about it," Chopin added, rather grimly.

"But you must remember that this young lady was an American," Lucie said, not without malice, "and American women are, of course, different."

"Different?" Rossini clapped his hands as he said it. "*Ma chère*



ROSSINI WAS POKING AROUND AMONG JO'S SAUCEPANS



*madame*, in that respect, no women are different. They are all alike." And to Chopin, "Don't you think so too, my dear Frédéric?"

"Of course," said Chopin, coming to the assistance of his friend.

"But you have an example right before you," Lucie continued, pointing to the ceiling. "Right up there above your heads, messieurs, there is a poor girl with a broken heart who has not smiled since she saw the man she wanted to love and could not. What answer can you give to that?"

"What answer? Well, that only proves that American men do not know how to handle their women. We Poles would know what to do!"

"So would we Italians," Rossini added proudly.

"How?" Lucie asked.

"How?" Chopin answered. "But, my dear lady, it is so very simple!" Then, turning to Frits, he asked, "Does that instrument in the corner work?"

"It does, if some one plays on it."

"Very well, my dear madam, if you want your answer, I shall now give it to you."

He pushed his chair back, sipped the last of his glass of wine, dropped his napkin on the table, and went over to the little minipiano which had been wished on Frits and now stood at the foot of the stairs. He opened it and tried a few chords. Then he made a pretty sour face and said, "*Oh là là!*" tried it once more, and played the opening notes of his Nocturne in G minor, the one that is known as the "Hamlet" Nocturne on account of its bleakness and loneliness. He pitched right in and he played magnificently—much better than I had expected from the descriptions I had read.

When Chopin came to the middle section, which sounds like a chorale, all of us were completely carried away. Even Jo and Hein came out of their kitchen and sat down on the lowest step of the stairs. As for Rossini, his head was thrown back and his eyes were closed, while his body was slowly swaying forward and backward. Erasmus was leaning his chin on his hands, and Lucie seemed to have completely passed out of the picture. I remembered a painting I had seen of those famous evening parties at the house of the Princess Tsartoryska, where our guest used to play for his fellow-exiles, and then understood the stir the young Chopin must have made among the Polish ladies of a century before.

I don't know why, but it so happened that at a given moment my eyes wandered towards the ceiling, and there, so help me heaven, I noticed that a small square of paper was being carefully pushed through a crack of the floor. It fluttered down like an autumn leaf and deposited itself among the flowers on the table. I picked it up and in Emily Dickinson's familiar handwriting, as clear as print, I read:

There's a certain slant of light,  
On winter afternoons,  
That oppresses, like the weight  
Of cathedral tunes.

I reached across the table and handed it to Lucie, who had been watching me. She smiled and put the piece of paper in her lap, picked it up once more, smiled again, this time pointing at Rossini, and returned to her own thoughts.

The nocturne came to an end, but, without waiting for us to catch our breath, Chopin went off into his famous Mazurka in A minor. I wondered what effect that would have upstairs, but I did not have to wait very long. Another smaller piece of paper came fluttering down. It contained only one line:

I measure every grief I meet.

The mazurka stopped with a loud final chord, and Chopin was off on his Barcarolle. This time I had to wait a little longer, but again a bit of paper was being pushed through the crack in the ceiling. And now Emily had written:

To stay the homesick, homesick feet  
Upon a foreign shore.

I judged from the way Chopin finished his Barcarolle that this would be his last piece, but by now he had warmed up to his task, and there followed his Ballade in F minor. To which Emily answered:

Beauty crowds me till I die.

After his ballade Chopin got up. "Could I have another cup of coffee, please, madam," he said to Jo, "and perhaps a small glass of cognac? I feel rather exhausted. It is so long since I touched the keys of a piano."

"You might give me one too, for I never tasted it," came a voice from a little higher up on the stairs. "Monsieur Chopin played so beautifully that he made me thirsty."

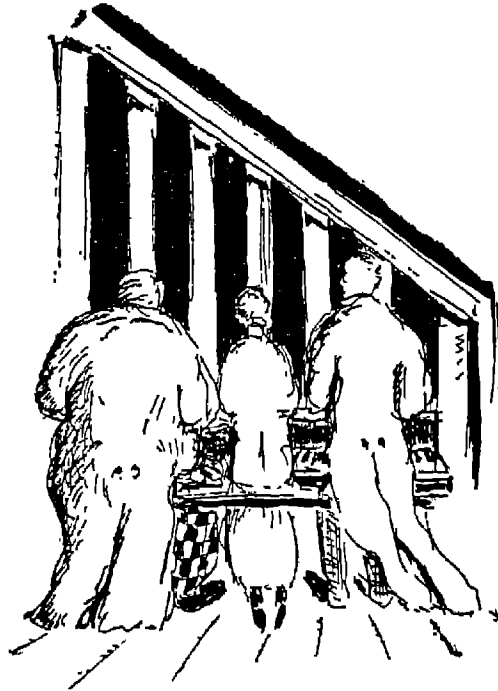
"Of course," said Jo, now again in control of the situation. "I will bring it up to you in a jiffy."

"Oh, don't bother to do that," Emily begged her in a voice as sweet as honey. "It would be too much trouble. Besides, you might spill some of it. That would be a waste, and we must never waste anything!"

"Then perhaps you had better sit down here," Lucie invited her. "This is a very comfortable chair, right by the fire, and you can go upstairs again as soon as you have finished your coffee."

But Emily did not go back to her safe retreat until a few minutes before it was time to go. For with one thing leading to another, we had a more hilarious evening than on any previous occasion. It appeared that Chopin

was not only a great composer and virtuoso, but also a most amusing mimic and an excellent actor. Rossini too was in his element. He sat down at the mini and undertook to show us how different famous singers had handled (and sometimes murdered) the *Largo al factotum* in his *Barber of Seville*. And finally—though no true worshipper of the late Emily Dickinson will believe this—our little Emily (no longer so very shy) went to the piano and gave us an imitation of one of her youthful Amherst swains, trying to entertain her with a sentimental love ballad.



ROSSINI, EMILY, AND CHOPIN PLAYING ON THE LITTLE PIANO

She had forgotten the words, but she substituted others which she made up as she went along.

Both Rossini and Chopin were delighted and now offered to turn that foolish melody into the sort of thing Mozart would have made of it, and after Mozart came Beethoven, and after Beethoven, Liszt (whom neither of them seemed to have liked very much), and in the end, all three of them were sitting on the same small bench, and the evening's entertainment developed into a regular jam session which did not come to an end until after Emily had given us another imitation, this time of Mary Lyon, the head of the South Hadley Female Seminary, lecturing her girls on "moral depravity." Whereupon Rossini, who, having been brought up as a Catholic, could afford to do so, gave us his version of a sermon he had once heard an old cardinal preach in the cathedral of Milan, a sermon on "mother love." As the cardinal, according to Rossini, had stammered quite badly, the imitation, though a little painful at first, soon became almost unbearably funny, and it was even improved upon when Chopin

sat down at the mini to play an obbligato to Rossini's sanctimonious exhortations.

Meanwhile, it had rapidly grown later, for clocks have a habit of going twice as fast as usual when you are enjoying yourself. Chopin's travelling-carriage, repaired by our village blacksmith (who most obligingly had left his warm bed to fix up the broken wheel), was waiting for him in front of the door. We had only a few minutes more. Lucie was sitting in front of the fire in eager conversation with Emily while Chopin and Rossini had withdrawn to the kitchen for a final cup of coffee and brandy. Erasmus was placidly dozing in his chair, and Frits and I were standing by the table, congratulating each other upon the success of our latest dinner-party.

A few minutes before midnight, Lucie took Emily upstairs to help her with her layers of shawls and scarves, and then we bundled our three guests into the big old coach. Suddenly all of us found ourselves singing *Auld Lang Syne*, but the clock struck the hour of twelve, and the coach rapidly disappeared round the corner of the market-place. As we went back into the house Lucie stopped me and said, "You owe me a new lipstick. Emily borrowed mine, but she never returned it."

## CHAPTER XIX

### The Sint Nikolaas Party, Given in Honour of the LOST CHILDREN OF HISTORY and Attended by That Noble Old Fellow, BENJAMIN FRANKLIN

**B**Y the way, Lucie," I asked her at luncheon the next day, "how are you getting along with your sweater for Erasmus?"

"It's almost done," Lucie told me.

"When are you going to give it to him?" I asked.

"At Christmas, I think."

"But why Christmas?" I asked. "Christmas will mean nothing to him."

"When would you suggest?"

"Do you know what day it is next Saturday?"

"I've forgotten."

"Sint Nikolaas' Day."

"So it is!"

"Then why don't we have a party for him? A special party such as he must have had when he was a boy?"

"A marvellous idea!"

"Excellent!" This from Frits. "Why, that is the best idea you have had for a long time! But I want to make a suggestion. Let's make it a children's party."

"For the kids of the village?"

"For those and for the others."

"What others?"

"The youngsters who never had a good time. The unfortunate ones like the little princes in the Tower. Hendrik can tell us about the others. There must have been lots of them."

I thought for a moment and then offered a few more candidates.

"Of course," I said, "there were the little princes in the Tower, those who were murdered by their uncle. And then there was the Dauphin, the son of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI, the youngster who disappeared in prison. And Virginia Dare, the first white child born in America. You remember? She was lost with all the other colonists. And Kaspar Hauser. That would already make quite a number."

"How about the infants of the Children's Crusade?" Jimmie asked.

"Yes," said Lucie, "and the boys and girls who followed the Pied Piper of Hamelin?"

"But think of my house," Frits warned. "There'd never be room enough for such a mob. Fifteen or twenty is all we could possibly pack in."

"How about hiring van Beveren's hall, where they repair the buoys in spring," Lucie suggested, "and inviting them all? You need not ask every one of the Hamelin boys and girls. I suppose a dozen or fourteen would be enough, and five or six from the Children's Crusade and a dozen or so of our own village children to make the others feel more at home."

That settled next Saturday's party.

We asked van Beveren whether we could have his place for a Sint Nikolaas party for the children of Veere (deeming it wiser not to mention the others), and then we set to work to make it such a party that our unhappy little guests would, for a while at least, forget the terrible things that had happened to them on earth.

Jo was in her element. She knew exactly what we should give this sort of guest. "It will probably be a cold night," she said, "what with the weather we have had so far. It will probably snow. I will therefore start them on Dutch pea-soup. The Doctor is for ever telling me about the pea-soup his mother used to make. I don't see why I can't do just as well! After that, the kids would love some kind of croquettes. They always do—croquettes seem to mean a party to them. Chicken croquettes, if I can get enough chickens, and otherwise plain veal croquettes. And, of course, there must be ice-cream, but for such a crowd you will have to order it from Middelburg, for I am afraid that my freezer is not big enough. And *speculaas*! Lots of *speculaas*. I can easily make that too, if I begin early enough. And oranges and apples and candy and those things you call 'pistaches.' You must remember them—we all had them when we were children—but only at very nice parties. They were small rolls of coloured paper with a funny cap inside and a funny poem and something at which you would pull and then it would go off with a bang."

"Crackers," Jimmie translated. "We call them crackers or favour-holders in America. I never had many of them as a child. My people were too religious to let me go to parties."

"Fine, and paper snowballs, for we won't have to clean up the mess. Van Beveren can do that. And a real Sint Nikolaas and a real Zwarte Piet with a rod for the bad children and presents for all those who have been good."

There followed a very busy week, and I think we had much more fun preparing everything than the children did when the party took place. Especially Jimmie, who used to get terribly fidgety unless she had something to do and who now could drive all day long between Middelburg and Veere to buy everything we needed. As for Frits, he thought it was so much fun that he telephoned his office in Amsterdam that he would

not be back for the rest of the week, and he also asked a friend of his, who was an amateur actor, to come down from Amsterdam and be our Sinterklaas. This friend was a newspaperman, but his paper still owed him a few days' vacation, so that he was able to join us on Saturday. Frits offered to play the part of Sinterklaas' black slave, who for some mysterious reason had always been known as Black Pieter, and Lucie knitted away at Erasmus' sweater when she was not at Jo's, helping her make *speculaas* soldiers and sailors and ships and houses and all the other figures children would expect.

Frits and Jimmie also plundered the Middelburg sixpenny stores, and soon we had enough presents for a small army. We did not tell Erasmus anything about what we were doing, for everything that happens on Sint Nikolaas evening must be surrounded by mystery. We merely explained that we had invited rather a larger number of people than usual, so that he must not be astonished if, for this once, we did not dine at Frits' home. We asked him to come to van Beveren's place, which, as we promised him, would be entirely comfortable, since we would start heating it up three days in advance.

As we wanted more than anything else to make Erasmus feel as if he had been in his mother's home, I had gone to the Middelburg library to consult some of the old cookery books they had there, and I had copied two sixteenth-century recipes for pea-soup and *speculaas*. Here they are:

To make *speculaas* you will need:

Of flour—150 grams [about  $\frac{3}{10}$  lb.]

Of butter—50 grams [about  $\frac{1}{10}$  lb.]

Of almonds—12½ grams [about  $\frac{1}{40}$  lb.]

Of powdered clove—2½ grams [one big pinch]

Of powdered cinnamon—½ teaspoon

One small dash of nutmeg

Also 5 grams of succade [candied lemon peel—big spoonful]

Finally, one big soup-spoonful of milk

Together with 100 grams of brown sugar [ $\frac{1}{8}$  lb.]

Dissolve the sugar in the milk, cut the peeled almonds in fairly large chunks, cut the succade up in small strips. Knead all these ingredients into a round ball and press this dough into *speculaas* forms cut into a wooden plank. Take a sharp knife and with this remove the superfluous dough. Put the cookies on a metal tray upon which you have sprinkled some fine, dry flour. Put the tray with the cookies into a fairly hot but not overhot oven until they are beginning to turn a light brown (about fifteen minutes), then let them cool off, and they will be ready to serve.

*North Netherlands Cookbook* (A.D. 1617)

And here is the recipe for the genuine Dutch pea-soup as it was given in the same cookery book, though of a slightly later date (A.D. 1639):

2 pig's feet  
 500 grams fresh sausage or 50 grams butter [1 lb. sausage or  $\frac{1}{10}$  lb. butter]  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  pint dried peas  
 4 quarts water  
 A bit of salt  
 4 leeks  
 A handful of celery green  
 1 heart of celery

Wash the peas and let them soak overnight in the cold water. Next morning let them simmer over a slow fire for about two hours, until they are thoroughly boiled, but be careful to proceed slowly. Then pass everything through a sieve and add the pig's feet. Let all this boil another hour. Then take the sausages, into which you have previously pricked a great many holes with a fork, and let the whole mess boil once more for about half an hour. Then take the sausages out, until fifteen minutes before serving, when you put the sausages in again, for they are to be eaten with the soup. Then add the vegetables, which in the meantime you have cut up into small pieces, and let everything boil over a slow fire until the meat has separated itself from the bones. In case you think it necessary, you can, from time to time, add a little water, and the soup will be ready as soon as it is no longer in any way lumpy.

That was the recipe. It was a bit complicated and indicated that our ancestors had more time than we, but Jo told us not to worry. She could easily fix it that way.

As one large bowl of that soup was the equivalent of a three-course dinner, we had now provided for the grown-ups as well as for the children and we dropped our plan of giving them chicken croquettes on top of it.

Thursday morning at breakfast I had an inspiration. Frits had now met several Americans and had found them very pleasant company. Why not ask another American to be with us on this particular evening? Some one who had been known to be fond of children—some one like old Benjamin Franklin, the most civilized American of the eighteenth century, the man whose ready wit and common horse sense had charmed and delighted young and old, kings and peasants—everybody who came in contact with him.

It was rather late to send him an invitation. Not that he would in the least mind being asked as an afterthought. He was not that type of person. But I had not the vaguest idea through what formalities my little slips of paper had to go before they were acted upon. Well, it would do no harm to try, and that evening the wobbly stone lion of the town hall was balancing itself on a slip of paper which bore the name of Benjamin



Franklin, inventor of the lightning-rod and author of the famous *Project to Arrive at Moral Perfection*.

As most Europeans know less about American history than they do about that of Greenland, I prepared a short *curriculum vitæ* of Dr Franklin for the benefit of my Dutch neighbours who would be present at our Sint Nikolaas party.

Benjamin Franklin was born in the year 1706 (in January, of course), and when he was ten years old it was quite possible for him to have met a few people who had lived through the Cromwellian period and who had seen Charles I step out of the famous window which led to his scaffold. When he died in the year 1790, the Declaration of Independence, which he himself had helped 'edit,' was already fourteen years old. He therefore was a kind of connecting link between the last stages of European feudalism and the first stages of American democracy.

In the span of time he covered, Franklin was not different from a great many of his neighbours who also reached the three-score and fourteen, but he was entirely unlike these others in his awareness of everything that took place around him and in his tremendous appetite for living. Furthermore, he not only watched what was actually happening, but his quick-thinking brain made it possible for him to see those events in their right perspective. In addition to this, he had been blessed with a glorious sense of humour and a most amiable and realistic view of the universe. All of which made it possible for him to spend sixty years in public life without ever losing faith in his fellow-men.

Not that Franklin had any particular reason to love them. At times, his fellow-Americans had bestowed a great deal of honour upon him, and especially towards the end of his days he was often treated more like a demigod than an ordinary human being. But he was much too intelligent not to know that the greatest ambition of his life—to keep the Anglo-Saxon world together as a co-operative political unit—had been a failure and could never be revived. His sound philosophical habit of mind-training prevented him from wasting useless tears upon that which could not be helped, but he would have been a great deal happier had he achieved his purpose, and the world at large would probably have been spared a couple of dozen wars.

As a rule, when we think of a great man we have a vision of him at one particular moment in his career. I always see Franklin as an old man, when he had done the work of a dozen ordinary mortals and when, in ordinary circumstances, he would have withdrawn from all further activities to await the end. But instead of settling down to that quiet and

dignified old age to which he was most assuredly entitled, he had started forth upon still further adventures and had so greatly impressed every one he met with the vigour of both his body and spirit that many people suspected him of having learned the secret of the life everlasting from his friends, the Indians of the Pennsylvania hinterland.

Ships had improved considerably from the days when his father had first crossed the ocean, but an ocean voyage during the last quarter of the eighteenth century was still far from comfortable, and the chances of reaching one's destination were always doubtful. Just the same, when the call of duty came, old Dr Franklin was not found wanting and, with his young grandson as his secretary, he sailed for France in search of those funds which were absolutely necessary if the cause of the rebellion were not to collapse through a lack of ready cash.

Arriving at last safely in Paris, but without the slightest idea how he would be able to pay for his board and upkeep, Franklin not only succeeded in getting in touch with the French Government, but he actually persuaded this already bankrupt concern to sink fifty million francs (which it did not have) into a cause that seemed about as hopeless as that of a free Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the last World War.

That was a pretty long sentence, but it sums up the whole situation in less than thirty words. At home, Congress was weak and without sufficient power to enforce its will upon the thirteen colonies, which often hated each other more cordially than they did the common enemy. The soldiers of General Washington were so sadly lacking in the daily necessities of life that they were seriously thinking of going back home and accepting any kind of peace rather than prolong a struggle which offered no possible expectations of victory. As for his colleagues, the other representatives of the sovereign United States of America, who were now wandering across the face of Europe, entrusted with mysterious diplomatic missions, they were so completely lost in their own little plans and ambitions and so hopelessly jealous of each other's success that they spent more time sniping at their Parisian colleague than trying to get those cannon and rifles for which General Washington's starving and freezing volunteers were clamouring with never-diminishing insistence.

To make the picture of his disillusionment perfect, Franklin's only surviving son (upon whom he had set such high hopes) had turned Tory and had joined those who opposed the war against his own country. His wife, with whom he had spent a great many placid and contented years, was dead, and he himself was suffering from that most painful of all maladies, gall-stones.

But Franklin never uttered a word of complaint. Once he had set foot on the soil of France, he proceeded to do what he had set out to do with

the same meticulous care and precision with which, half a century earlier, he had founded his Philadelphia publishing house. Being a past master at handling men, he carefully planned the assault he would have to make on the entrenched bureaucracy of Versailles. He kept away from that madhouse and settled down in near-by Passy. From his modest retreat in that somnolent suburb (in a house lent him by a French banker friend) he so cleverly manipulated his one-man propaganda that ere London had become fully aware of his presence on the other side of the ocean, France had definitely taken the side of the transatlantic rebels, and the war of freedom was won.

I have made a pilgrimage to that little house at the corner of the Rue Raymond and the Rue Singer (the first French home, by the way, ever to be protected by a lightning-rod), and I have sat in the Passy coffee-houses, even as old Benjamin must have done during that long stay of his as our commissioner. I have watched him there, coming down the narrow street, conspicuous in the clothes of a bygone generation in the midst of the most fashionable world of his day, wearing his outlandish beaver hat (that beaver hat was to become one of his assets as the representative of a truly democratic nation) and making himself the living symbol of democratic simplicity in the heart of a country where the word 'liberty' had not been heard for the last three centuries.

I have quietly observed Franklin partaking of his cup of chocolate (no coffee, if you please, for a man with gall-stones) and munching the nuts which had come to him by the latest packet just arrived in Bordeaux ("Have a nut, your Majesty! They're from my own garden in Philadelphia and are sent to me regularly, now that there is no longer any danger from English privateers"), and I have rather indiscreetly stared at him as he put on his big, old-fashioned glasses and started to read his mail (arrived on the same ship as the nuts). And I have wondered what was going on in his mind while he took off his glasses to wipe them clean with a large, old-fashioned handkerchief (old-fashioned things being part of his rôle as the venerable sage from the New World) to make sure that his eyes did not deceive him and that he actually read what he thought he was reading—an endless tale of blunders and acts of cowardice and narrow-minded selfishness.

And then I have shared his joy when he opened still another document, bearing the private seal of General Washington, and when he learned that all was not yet lost, that the General still stood as a rock of confidence in the midst of a sea of doubt, and that the General, in spite of the treachery and betrayal with which he was surrounded, would continue to fight the battle for liberty until either victory should have been won or he himself should have lost his life.

At such moments I have perhaps wavered a little in my devotion to that other great patriot, Mr Thomas Jefferson, of Albemarle County in Virginia, whom I always considered the leading figure of the Revolution, for I felt that I could bestow just as great an affection upon this old man with his plain face (but elegant manners), his quaint speech (hiding a profound knowledge of the English language), his shambling gait (but with feet that would unerringly carry him to his ultimate destination). Yes, there have been moments when I could actually have loved old Ben, the printer and mail-carrier, the diplomat, and one of the half-dozen men directly responsible for the founding of our independent republic.

The sentiment just expressed was by no means shared by all Dr Franklin's contemporaries. Those who based their position in life on inherited privilege, those who lived upon the labours of others, those who hoped to get a great deal in return for very little beyond the fact that they had taken the trouble to be born—all of them most cordially detested and feared this dangerous revolutionary rabble-rouser who had tried to deprive the Penn family of their legitimate revenues, who had helped to bring education within reach of every one by substituting English for Latin as the main object of a gentleman's education, and who had actually preached the pernicious doctrine that candidates for office should be appointed according to their abilities rather than the social and economic status of their families. And all these Tories and reactionaries had called Ben Franklin a Red and a Communist (or whatever was the eighteenth-century equivalent of these words), who was perhaps not without a certain talent but who must be kept in his place, no matter by what means.

But where was the right place for a man who had started life as one of a brood of thirteen children of an impecunious if honourable Boston soap-boiler who (horrible thought to most of his neighbours!) had not only been a recent immigrant but also a creature suspected of nonconformist leanings—and that in a Boston still dominated by the old Puritan theocracy? And how could one hope to keep a person within the bounds of social and economic respectability when at the age of twenty-six he had already established himself as the leading printer of the thirteen disunited colonies and had attained such a degree of financial independence that the threat of withdrawing a contract merely made him laugh and might even provoke him into telling you that you had better try elsewhere, for he never again meant to set a line of type on any job you intended to entrust to his care?

In addition to all these reprehensible qualities, the upstart seemed to have been endowed with a very pronounced flair for science, so that (in spite of his never having gone to a respectable college like Harvard or

Yale) he had gained world-wide fame as the inventor of the lightning-rod; as the inventor of a new kind of stove which for the first time in their career had made it possible for the New England farmers not to spend the winters rolled up in horse blankets, and as the ardent advocate of a public lighting system by which citizens going out for an evening stroll were now saved from breaking their necks by falling over their neighbours' dustbins. Most important of all, how could you successfully attack one of the cleverest publicists of his day, the author of the best-selling almanac in an age when most people in the New World read only two books—that and God's Bible?

I could continue in this vein for several pages more, but I am not writing a life of Dr Benjamin Franklin, Postmaster General of his Majesty's colonies on the other side of the ocean. ("Damn the fellow! within a year he has turned that service from an everlasting money-loser into a most profitable source of revenue!") I am merely trying to show you the sort of person you are going to meet this coming Saturday.

America until *now* has produced only two universal geniuses. One of them was Benjamin Thompson, of the village of Woburn in Massachusetts, and the other was Benjamin Franklin, of the village of Boston in the same province. But Benjamin Thompson chose to be on the wrong side of the fence, and when the Revolution broke out he was obliged to escape so as to avoid being tarred and feathered by his own neighbours. After a brilliant career in what he still considered his mother country, he moved to Austria and to Bavaria and in the latter country he had become the benevolent power behind the Bavarian throne, changing that backward country from a state of almost complete medievalism into as modern a nation as was to be found anywhere in the Europe of the Napoleonic era. His success had earned him the title of a count of the Holy Roman Empire, and all future generations should praise him as the man who first of all had the courage to lay down the law that it is a better policy to make hungry people first of all happy by feeding them and then give them a chance to become virtuous, rather than by first trying to make them virtuous by force in the expectation that their newly gained consciousness of moral rectitude would thereupon satisfy the gnawing pains of hunger in their empty entrails.

The other universal genius produced by the New World—that enlightened citizen who, in spite of all temptations to lure him away from his cause, stuck faithfully to his homeland—was our good Dr Franklin. And therefore, while we politely salute Benjamin Thompson, Count Rumford, as a most interesting historical phenomenon, we honour and revere Benjamin Franklin, for though he never gained any titles beyond those bestowed upon him by his fellow-Freemasons, he gained everlasting

renown as one of the real founders of that experiment in self-government which soon may become the last surviving stronghold of democracy and therefore the only hope for a better and more human kind of world.

Kant's far-reaching *Critique of Pure Reason* appeared while Franklin was in France. He may have read it and he may not. He did considerable travelling through Germany, but he never, as far as I know, visited Königsberg. It would have been nice if we could have arranged an evening at which these two interesting men would have had a chance to exchange and expound their views. I even thought for a moment of including Immanuel Kant in our Sint Nikolaas festivities, but I hesitated to invite a professional philosopher to a children's party. Children are apt to ask such embarrassing questions!

Our Sint Nikolaas party, I am delighted to say, was an unqualified success. We had asked Lucie and Jimmie to come and help us, for while we could take care of the little boys, they would know much better than we what to do with the small girls, and we had no idea whether Virginia Dare had lived to a ripe old age or had died in infancy. When she came she proved to be only seven, for having been adopted by an Indian family, she too had succumbed to 'a complaint of the chest' (tuberculosis, of course) when the rest of the tribe which had murdered her parents and her fellow-settlers had fallen victims to that dreadful disease.

Lucie and Jimmie and Jo had gone straight to the big meeting-hall, where Erasmus too had promised to come. But Frits and I were still at his house, busily engaged upon the not so easy task of changing his actor friend into something resembling a *bona fide* bishop of the fourth century of our era. Poor Frits, who was not familiar with the difficult art of blacking up, had by this time got so much more black on his shirt than on his face that we were obliged to take him out into the garden to get him <sup>clean</sup> and we had rather stupidly forgotten to watch the clock, until we were suddenly called back to reality by a loud voice which demanded to be informed whether he was at the place where he was supposed to be or whether they expected him somewhere else. It was Benjamin Franklin who had walked in on us and who now stood in front of our open fire and was looking at it with eyes that expressed everything but approval.

Without waiting to be introduced, he poked his cane into the burning pieces of firewood (big logs were not to be had in Veere for love or money) and then said, "My dear young men, don't you see what you are doing? You are wasting half of your heat. More than that, I would say. It may be as much as three-quarters. Now if only you would move the logs up a little farther forward and put a curved iron plate behind the fire—but

then, of course, you would have to change your chimney too and—oh well, what's the use? You misguided Europeans will never know how to be comfortable!”

Then he sniffed. “What is that peculiar smell?” he asked. “Dampness? Yes, it can't be anything else. How do you manage to survive in this quagmire? And yet there is nothing simpler than to keep a house dry. We had a lot of trouble with damp houses in Philadelphia. The Dutchmen who lived with us were the worst offenders. I don't mean your kind of Dutchman. I mean those immigrants from the Palatinate. They were an obstinate lot, and the way they had built their houses in the old fatherland was the way they must build them even after they had come to America. So I made quite an investigation of the problem. I found that it depended entirely upon the way you had started your cellars. Of course, this house is pretty old, I suppose?”

“It was built in the year 1562.”

“That was long before my time, though sometimes I feel as if I were as old as Methuselah. I know that I don't look it! Indeed, I don't look a day over sixty. But that's easy. There's no trick to it. I will tell you how it can be done. Never worry about what may happen to-morrow, for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, it won't. And don't take things too seriously, for very few things are worth it.

“And now, please show me where the entrance to your cellar is. I'd like to inspect it and I'm sure I can then tell you how to fix it so that you won't have to live any longer in a cave like this. It is disgusting and—worse than that—it is unnecessary.”

I showed him the door to our cellar.

“Oh, there it is! Now, just let me have a candle and I will tell you in a jiffy. I like to be useful around the house. Got the habit from my mother. She came from Nantucket. Ever been in Nantucket?”

I told him I knew the island well.

“That's interesting! Did it stay with the Union or did those obstinate Quakers declare themselves independent in the end? You will remember that they were always threatening to do so.”

I assured our guest that the last time I had been there, Nantucket had still been part of the Union.

“That's all to the good, but what a headache they were—all those little villages and those little cities and even some of the smaller provinces. They caused us more trouble than the big ones put together! Each one had his own junto—a useful institution if handled the right way. I started one of my own in Philadelphia when the Quakers and the Dutchmen and the Penns refused to do their share in the wars with the French, but it takes a man who knows what he wants to handle them properly.

Whereas in those hamlets the jundos were usually run by a small clique of Hotchkissons and Wedderburns, eminent Philadelphians whose fathers or grandfathers had stolen themselves rich, cheating one another and the poor Indians.

"When the Revolution began, these families somehow hoped to become the king-pins of the new régime. They never looked any farther than their noses, and most of them were snubnosed. But they made the mistake of their lives when they called in George Washington to save their necks from the English hangmen.

"Old George, bless him, came to Cambridge and gave them one look, and after that he treated all these little potentates like the dirt under his feet. Of course, he too was a good deal of an autocrat. He loved to be called Your Excellency and to act the part. I am a plain man and don't go in for that sort of nonsense. But in spite of all that, I honoured old George. He was a great man. But then, all those slaveholders had an air of 'Yes, my good fellow, and what is it you want?' I suppose it was because they always had had so many Negroes hanging around them, ready to do their bidding. There was only one exception. That was Tom Jefferson. A nice youngster was Tom, and brighter than the rest of us put together. And now let me see"—holding up his candle. "Just as I thought! Your cellar is all wrong, but it can easily be fixed. Let me show you . . ."

But I never discovered how Frits' house could be made as dry as a bone, for Jimmie was yelling to us from the top of the cellar stairs that if we did not want to be much too late for our party, we had better come up right away. So we climbed the stairs, and I introduced Mr Franklin to Mrs van Loon as a fellow-Pennsylvanian.

"And where were you born, my dear madam?" asked old Benjamin, giving her a bow which showed that he had not wasted his time at the court of Versailles.

"In Harrisburg, sir," said James, who rarely sirred anybody.

"Harrisburg? Let me see. That is where old John Harris had his ferry, wasn't it? I knew John when I first came to Philadelphia. And so that village became a town afterwards?"

"It is the state capital now," said Jimmie, with more pride than I had ever seen her take before in her native city.

"That shows that the people of Pennsylvania have at last got a little sense. After the way the Philadelphians let the General's troops starve that winter in Valley Forge, they no longer deserved to be the capital of a civilized community. And look at what they did to my poor academy! The moment I was looking the other way they turned it from a free school for the poor into a Latin hothouse for the



children of the rich. The same old story, and it seems as if they will never learn.

"As for the Reverend William Smith, who spoiled all my lovely plans, that fellow should have been hanged! But I suppose I really had no one to blame but myself. I appointed him. Then he went back on me. Yes, he should have been hanged, though we Freemasons don't believe in capital punishment. Yes, ma'am—at your disposal, ma'am—and what do we do now? I am under the impression that I was to have the pleasure of meeting a few youngsters. No reflection on your age, ma'am. How old are you, anyway?"

"Forty-nine."

"Well, ma'am, you surely don't look it. You must have learned not to worry. You must have read my almanacs. Do they still print them?"

"No, I'm afraid they don't. At least, I have never seen any. Your name now appears on only one magazine published in Philadelphia."

"I have heard about it," Benjamin answered, but offered no further comment, except to look at his big, old-fashioned watch and to remark, "It is late, and one should never let children wait. In the first place, it is not polite and, in the second place, they might break the house down. And so, with your permission, I suppose we had better be off, and I see there is the good Saint!"

For by now the Bishop was at last duly garbed in all his white-and-golden glory while his servant was as black as our kitchen stove, and everything was ready. Most of us were able to find room in Frits' car, which was a great deal larger than our own Chevrolet, but the Saint took up so much room that I preferred to walk. However, it was no distance at all, and when we reached the small hall we had rented for that evening, we found the party already in full swing. The day before, while driving through the Middelburg streets in search of our crackers (hard to get them in such a small town) I had come upon a fellow playing the accordion in the street. He was a wizard, and then and there he had been hired to come to Veere the next night to play for the children. He had arrived on the seven-o'clock bus and was now warming up. That is what he called it, but I never heard such an avalanche of arpeggios and glissandi, such tremolos and such juggling with notes and chords, as came pouring out of his instrument.

Lucie and Erasmus were sitting comfortably in front of the stove, which was red-hot. During the afternoon it had once more started snowing quite heavily, and the hall, although ventilated and heated for the last three days, was still quite damp and smelling heavily of tar and paint. I wondered what Franklin would say! But he was too much engrossed with the children to favour us with another lecture on ventilation.



BENJAMIN FRANKLIN INSPECTS OUR CELLAR

We had declared in favour of candles over kerosene lamps. They were perhaps a little dangerous with so many small boys and girls around, but we had several pails of sand placed in convenient corners and would keep a careful lookout for accidents.

By the light of the candles it was at first a little difficult to see how many youngsters there were. We had invited a dozen of our small neighbours, six boys and six girls. We had been careful to ask such among the girls as still wore the beautiful old Zeeland costume, and they were a joy to the eye in their starched lace caps and with the coloured kerchiefs that served as bodices.

They were, quite naturally, a little bit scared of those other strange-looking children who had arrived only a few moments before, and they seemed especially awed by little Virginia Dare, who was dressed entirely in animal skins—"just like a real Indian," as one of the boys whispered to me when we came in, "those Indians you see in the movies!"

One of the little girls, braver than the rest, had already made friends with the little Dauphin, who was dressed very handsomely in black satin and who was a very good-looking boy, bearing a striking resemblance to his mother, though he already showed a beginning of that slightly puffy chin so characteristic of his father's family.

The boys and girls from Hamelin (we knew them from the costumes we had seen on the walls of Hamelin's *Rattenkrug*) seemed to have established the most cordial relations with the boys and girls from the Children's Crusade, but the two little princes from the Tower were a pathetic sight. They looked miserably scared and were sitting on two pillows, as close as possible to Lucie, who was patting the head of the older one, who in turn was holding his small brother's hand.

When we came in, our accordion virtuoso had just been rendering his own version, with many interesting variations, of a well-known old Dutch melody, the song of Piet Hein who captured the Spanish treasure fleet, but he stopped when he noticed us and slipped into *The Parade March of the Grenadiers*, a tune known to every Dutch child. As soon as they heard this, the Veere infants lost their self-consciousness. They rushed wildly up to the foreign children. Each Veere girl grabbed the arm of one of the boys, and each Veere boy did likewise with one of the little girls from abroad, and, without being told, they formed a regular procession and started marching through the room. The accordion player (who for the occasion had put a gay feather in his hat) walked ahead, and the rest of us followed him with the good Saint well in the rear. Behind Sint Nikolaas walked his black servant, rolling his eyes wildly and grimacing most savagely at all the children. On his back he carried a heavy burlap bag full of presents which would be distributed afterwards.

In his right hand he held a light birchwood stick, and underneath his left arm rested a large book, the volume from which the Saint would read the good and evil deeds that the children had committed during the previous twelve months.

The head of the procession had almost reached the place where Erasmus was sitting, when the door opened, and a very small boy on crutches came in. Jimmie went up to him and asked him kindly who he was and what he wanted. The little boy seemed very much bewildered, as if he felt that he had done something he should not have done. Then, wringing his felt cap with both hands, he suddenly burst forth in tears and buried his head in her skirt.

"Please, gracious lady," he pleaded, "please don't send me back!"

"Of course not," Jimmie assured him, "of course we won't send you back, but we can't let little boys walk all over the village so late at night and all alone, so tell me—who are you and how do you happen to be here?"

He wiped his eyes with the back of his rather grimy hand and then he said, "My name is Johann, and I am from Hamelin. You see, I was the small boy who could not keep up with the others because I had to use crutches. And so I never got into that mountain, for the doors were closed just when I reached it, and I lost all the fun the others had, and then they never came back, and I had no one to play with afterwards, for they were all of them inside the mountain and none of them were ever seen again. I have been so terribly lonely all my life long, and the fathers and mothers of the others hated me because, as they told me, I used to remind them of their own children whom they had lost. Sometimes they even beat me, although I had done nothing bad, and I heard that some of the other boys and girls would be here to-night and I wanted so much to see them," and he broke forth into such a deluge of tears that Jo, who was somewhat better suited for such maternal activities than either Lucie or Jimmie, picked him up in her arms and carried him over to the other Hamelin children, who at first looked at the lonely boy as if they could not believe their eyes and then, shouting, "*Johann! das ist unser lieber, kleiner Johann!*" took him by both hands and, regardless of his crutches, dragged him into a wild roundelay which was so contagious that the others at once followed suit and joined in the fray.

The maestro, who was a quick-witted fellow, immediately caught the spirit of the occasion. Dropping his march, he switched over into an old-fashioned polka and, by this stroke of genius, turned the hall into a complete bedlam in which Benjamin Franklin hopped and skipped between Jimmie and Jo until everybody had joined except Erasmus, who sadly shook his head when Lucie invited him to dance with her, but who immediately afterwards changed his mind and performed a *pas seul*

with so much elegance and dexterity that I wondered whether all those evenings at Sir Thomas's hospitable house had really (as he always told us) been spent singing madrigals or listening to serious discussions upon the subject of infant damnation and transubstantiation.

This, of course, could not go on for very long. We had a bishop with us, the real honest-to-goodness Bishop of Myra, and he was there for a very special purpose. It was about time we gave His Sanctity a chance to officiate according to the solemn rites of the feast which all these many centuries had been associated with his name.

I therefore clapped my hands. The troubadour stopped his playing, and all the Dutch children stood stock-still, for now they knew that the



SINT NIKOLAAS STILL MADE HIS ROUNDS OVER THE ROOFS OF  
OUR HOUSES

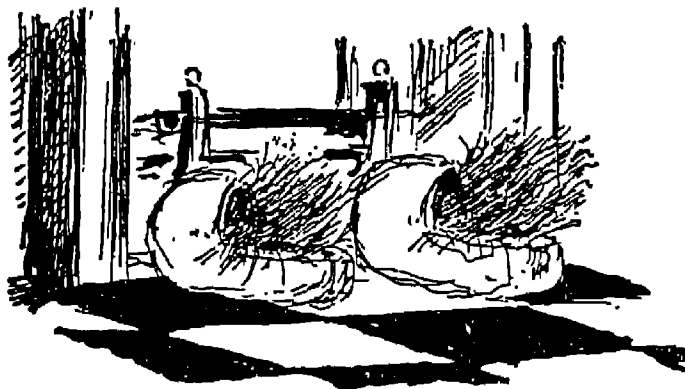
great moment of the evening had come and, as Sint Nikolaas is a very mighty personage to them (and quite as real as their own fathers and uncles), they did not want to spoil anything by indulging in a little more horseplay.

Jo and Lucie and the other grown-ups now bade all the youngsters seat themselves in a semicircle. Sint Nikolaas next stepped forward, and his black slave dropped his heavy bag on the floor, and the *Musikant* played a fanfare, and the moment for which all our little Dutch guests had waited had at last arrived.

Our newspaper friend played his rôle superbly and closely observed all the best traditions of the true Sint Nikolaas ritual. First of all he told everybody how happy he was that he had been able to reach Veere in time. It had not been an easy voyage, for all the roads were covered with snow and so were the roofs of the houses across which he had been obliged to ride to find out what present each child wanted him to bring. Yes, it had been so slippery that he had almost had an accident. His horse had slipped, but it had saved itself in time, and now the beast was

in its stable, enjoying the hay which the children had left for him in their wooden shoes which they had placed at the foot of their chimneys the night before. That had been very thoughtful of them, and he was happy that he had come to a village where all the little boys and girls were so nice to animals.

Then a short pause. Or was he mistaken? Had some of them perhaps not been quite as good as they should have been? Here the Veere small fry exchanged knowing glances. Some of them began to look far from comfortable. How much did the Saint know? Could he possibly have found out about that time they had broken a window in the dominie's house while playing ball in the street? And how much could he have learned about that other occasion, when they had stolen pocketfuls of a



THE WOODEN SHOES, FULL OF HAY FOR SINT NIKOLAAS HORSE,  
STOOD IN FRONT OF THE FIREPLACE

neighbour's apples? Of course, when they were alone they told each other that there was no Sint Nikolaas—that he was really a grown-up with false whiskers and was merely made up to look like a real bishop. All the same, one never could tell, and now he had opened that big book and was beginning to read from it in a most solemn voice.

Well, first of all, he had heard that one of his young friends—although he perhaps was a little older than most of the others—was for ever complaining about being cold and that he had expressed a wish for a sweater that would really keep him warm. Since he, Sint Nikolaas, lived only to make everybody happy, he had decided to give him a sweater in which he would be able to brave a winter at the North Pole. Now if Master Erasmus would please get up and accept the little parcel Sint Nikolaas had brought him, then he might therein find something he had always wanted, had always very much hoped for.

At this, Erasmus, looking more delighted than he could have done on that famous occasion when he received his gold medal from the Pope, arose from his chair and walked up to the Saint, who handed him a large bundle done up in all sorts of gaily coloured ribbons and addressed to

Dr Erasmus, c/o Mr Frits Philips, Veere, Island of Walcheren, Zeeland Erasmus took the package with a deep and solemn bow and made ready to return to his seat, but suddenly all the Dutch children started shouting, "Open it! You must open it!"

So Erasmus, who apparently had forgotten this part of the ceremony, put the package on the table we had placed at the side of the room for that express purpose and began to unwrap his gift. But no sooner had he taken off the first layer of paper than he came upon a second one with another label. He read it and then, amidst the hilarious joy of small guests, he said, "But this was a mistake. It was not really for me. It really was for Dr van Loon. It says so on the label."

Then I went dutifully through my share of unpacking, but of course I found out that it was really meant for Dr B. Franklin. Old Benjamin then picked up the scissors, only to discover that, after all, the bundle should have gone to Lucie. Some fifteen minutes went by in this way, the package changing hands a dozen times, until at long last (and now having dwindled greatly in size) it remained in the definite possession of Erasmus, and out of it came that beautiful red woollen sweater which Lucie had knitted for him. He held it up for all to admire and then he said, "But I could not ever wear this, for it would make me a cardinal."

"Why not?" I asked him. "You could have been one if you had wanted to."

"Perhaps so, but then it hardly seemed the right thing for me to do."

"Now it is," Lucie smiled back at him.

"Indeed, and so it is, my dear madam, and I shall ever remember the fair hands that knitted it for me."

But he too remained faithful to the code of Sint Nikolaas evening, that one must never in any circumstances pretend to know who has given you any particular present, and then he excused himself and with Hein went into a small side-room and came back a few minutes later with a big bulge underneath his shoulders.

"Well, Doctor," Jo asked him, "and how are you feeling now? Warm at last?"

"Wonderful! I am really and truly warm for the first time in almost four hundred years. And who is getting the next present?"

This time it was the turn of Benjamin Franklin. A few weeks before, while rummaging through Bal's antique shop in Middelburg, I had come across a dozen old blue tiles showing small boys and girls flying kites. As soon as I suspected that Dr Franklin might be one of our guests, I had telephoned Bal and, as I had found him very reasonable in his prices, I had asked him to have the tiles framed and sent to me. Now Sint

Nikolaas made a very gracious speech about bright little boys who loved to fly kites, and Benjamin Franklin got up and received his gift.

Jo was next. She was asked to step over to the small side-room where Erasmus had put on his sweater. There she found a beautiful new gas stove for her own kitchen which Frits and I had bought for her. We felt that we owed her something a little better than what we might have given her in ordinary years, for without her, our dinner-parties would never have been the success they had become.

Jo thanked Sint Nikolaas most effusively for his most generous present, for that is something you are allowed to do. You may thank the Saint, but there must be nothing personal in your expressions of gratitude.

Then Black Pieter felt it was his turn to take a hand in the proceedings. He suddenly opened his burlap bag and with a quick gesture threw handfuls of candy among the children. By this time, the little murdered princes had so completely lost their shyness that they rolled as merrily across the floor as the others, and there was a free-for-all which ended in the usual fight when the two smallest of the Veere girls had got hold of the same stick of peppermint at the same moment. Hein settled this controversy by lifting them up as if they had been ill-behaved puppies, and peace and harmony once more returned to the hall.

The grown-ups had now been taken care of, and the time had come for Sinterklaas to open his big book to find out which of the children had been good enough during the previous year to deserve being remembered and which should be spanked with Black Pieter's birchwood rod. We had somehow feared that some of our small foreign guests might not quite understand this part of the ceremonies and therefore we had slightly changed this chapter. Sinterklaas merely studied his pages for a few minutes and then remarked that, as far as he could see, they had all of them been pretty good. He therefore would leave it up to them to decide what he should do.

"All of you get up," he commanded, "and now tell me—on your word of honour and cross your heart—have all of you been really good enough to deserve some kind of present?"

The Dutch children answered for their foreign friends.

"Ye-s-s, ye-s-s! Sinterklaas," they shouted in unison. "Cross our hearts and hope we die! We have tried awfully hard to be good." And the little Dauphin got so carried away by the noise they made that he too clapped his hands and said, "*Oui, monsieur l'archevêque, j'ai été un très brave garçon!*"

"And you feel that none of you deserve to be spanked?" the Saint continued.

A thunderous "No-o-o-o-o!" followed this question.



"*Et toi, mon prince?*" the Saint asked the Dauphin.

"*Non, monseigneur, pas du tout!*" the boy protested, anxiously looking around him as if he feared that the terrible shoemaker would be there to administer another undeserved lashing.

"Very well, then," said Sinterklaas and, reaching behind him, took the birchwood rod in both hands, broke it across his knees, and threw the pieces among the children, who once more used this opportunity for a grand free-for-all fight which would have gone on for heaven knows how long if the faithful black man had not changed it into a scramble for more candy by emptying the rest of his bag among the little ladies and gentlemen rolling so merrily across the floor of the smelly, paint-stained hall.

That was about the end of the official part of the evening. It was getting late, and the children were getting hungry. All that still remained to be done was to distribute the presents. We had left it to Lucie and Jimmie to choose them, and they had done a first-rate job. First of all came the Lost Children, and each seemed to be getting what he or she had always hoped for. And then all the little Veerenaars received their share, and Jo told them, "Now get up, children, and we will bring in your table."

Thereupon she and Hein and Benjamin Franklin and I (for Frits must not fall out of his rôle of Black Pieter) carried in a big table, which had been got ready in the other room, and Hein brought in a lot of chairs, and the children unrolled their napkins (a funny cap came rolling out of every napkin), and when they beheld the table with a large *speculaas* figure awaiting them at every seat, there was a loud hooray which grew even louder when Hein returned with a large tray and they realized that they were going to have their favourite dish—hot pea-soup with pig's knuckles.

After that, silence except for the clicking of the spoons of both children and grown-ups, but the brew appealed so greatly to Benjamin Franklin that he got up and proposed a toast to the cook who had been responsible for this "piping hot nectar" and asked her for the recipe, for, as he explained, "If we had had that soup for our troops, the war would not have lasted more than a year and, believe me, there never would have been any Valley Forge."

There were fresh outbreaks of joy when the ice-cream was brought in, for each child received a lovely flower in pink or green or yellow, resting elegantly upon a bed of white spun sugar. This sugar at first frightened the two little princes, who thought it was glass until they saw their Dutch friends gulp it down by the spoonful, when they took courage, picked it up in their fingers, and liked it so much that they asked for more.

And what happened after that? I am sorry, but I feel that that should remain a matter about which the world had better not know too much. For the end of the evening was filled with so much sadness, it was so full of unconscious tragedy, that I would rather not talk about it.

No, nothing very startling occurred. The children ate until they could hold no more, but they behaved like lambs. Then Benjamin Franklin told them stories about the time he had been in the army and had fought in the American wilderness and had met real Indians (when he mentioned the Indians, Virginia Dare looked quite proud and very superior), and our newspaper friend, who had once more discarded his regalia and had been duly introduced as another guest just arrived, performed some wonderful tricks with eggs and with burning candles and bowls of water that were suddenly filled with gold-fish, and the maestro played all his jolliest tunes on his accordion, and then the boys and girls, although they did not know a word of one another's languages, sang lots and lots of songs, and Jo arranged them in two groups—the boys on one side and the girls on the other—and taught them a number of old-fashioned Dutch kissing games. And then, as if they were obeying a silent signal, the children suddenly grew very sleepy—and that is when gaiety left us and tragedy walked in.

For those poor little mites seemed to feel that very soon they would have to bid each other farewell and by this time they had grown so fond of each other that they did not want to say good-bye. The little Veerenaars had not quite known in the beginning what to make of their strange-looking friends in their outlandish costumes. But they had soon sensed that there was something mysterious about them—that they had gone through certain experiences which had left deep marks upon them—and where (so they whispered to each other) were their fathers and mothers and why couldn't they play like the other children, but had to be encouraged to laugh and to be gay, as if they did not quite understand that they were allowed to dance and be happy to their hearts' content? Why, in the middle of one of those lovely games, where at the end you were allowed to kiss your partner, had they looked with such frightened eyes at the doors as if somebody might come in and hurt them? Why, whenever a plate or a cup had fallen, had they stiffened up as if expecting a sudden blow? And because, childlike, they had felt that those other boys and girls lived in a constant dread of some terrible calamity, they had tried to reach out to them by being very nice to them—much nicer than they ever were to each other—and though they would stoutly have denied it if one had been tactless enough to tell them so, they had actually wrapped little scraps of love around the thin shoulders of their small comrades.

But from their side, too, the Lost Children had undergone quite a change.

They had almost completely lost their former fear and shyness. They were really beginning to enjoy themselves, but they seemed very dejected at the prospect that all this could not last much longer and would very soon come to an end. They clung desperately to the hands of their Dutch playmates. The Dauphin (there the Bourbon blood showed itself!) had chosen the prettiest of the Veere girls to be his particular companion. The two princes were both of them sitting in a large chair with their arms around a small Zeeland girl, too far gone with sleep and food to know or care what was happening. And our little Indian and a Veere boy were contentedly scraping the last of the ice-cream (now a lukewarm soup) out of the glass jar into which Jo had dropped the left-overs. But all of them seemed apprehensive of the moment they would have to depart.

It was then that the good Frits, with his great understanding and tact, did one of those things for which every one who ever met him must also love him.

He climbed on to his chair, clapped his hands, and shouted, "Children, I want to ask you a question. Did you have a nice time?"

A loud hooray showed him how they felt about it.

"Then would you like to have another party like this next year?"

This time I was afraid their noise would lift the roof.

"Very well! Then I will tell you something. I talked to Sinterklaas before he left, and he promised me that if he possibly can do so he will meet you here again, not only next year but every year after, and now you may kiss each other good-bye and say, 'Till next year,' and then we will all sing one more song."

But that song was never sung. For the relentless clock struck the fatal hour. And when Hein carried in a lamp, the Veere boys and girls found that their newly found friends were gone.

Fortunately, children, to whom the whole of the world is a constant mystery, rarely stay surprised very long. They looked at each other a little sheepishly, hastened to make sure that they would not forget to take home the presents they had received, and, having been bundled into their mufflers and shawls, were all of them packed happily into the car in which Frits was going to drive them home. But suddenly they remembered that they had forgotten something and they came trooping back into the hall. They gave each one of us a very dirty little paw (covered with floor dust, chocolate cake, pea-soup, candy, and ice-cream), said, "Thank you very much for a very pleasant evening," and returned to the car, satisfied that they had done their duty and now could assure their mothers, "I did what you told me. I said, 'Thank you very much, Mynheer Frits,' and he answered that we had been so good that we could come again next year. Will you let me go, Ma? Please!"

## CHAPTER XX

### FRIDTJOF NANSEN, JAKOB VAN HEEMSKERK, WILLEM BARENTS, and SURGEON DE VEER Are Our Visitors on a Very Cold Night in December

**W**E happened to be talking about the heroes of our childhood days. During the last months we had met so many strange people—famous men and women who had made their mark upon history—that the subject was bound to come up sooner or later.

Both Frits and I were well aware of the small esteem in which our own world held the 'exceptional man' and how his place had been taken by the 'average man' as the centre of public interest. We had often discussed the problem with our guests and had found that all of them agreed with us that a world without adequate and forceful leadership would never succeed in setting the human race free from the slavery of its own fears and ignorance. Not being entirely blind to the things that were happening around us, we also understood why the exceptional people were enjoying such a bad Press. In a world filled with the unpleasant noises of a Hitler and a Mussolini, wildly shrieking their belief in their God-given missions and giving loud expression to their hatred and contempt for everybody and everything else, one did not like to hear anything more about 'leadership' than could possibly be helped.

"But," as Frits asked quite sensibly, "what do these noisy fellows prove? Of course, they are terrible people, these Duces and Führers. I detest them. I have seen them at work and I loathe them. But what in God's name do they prove? Only one thing. That they are the wrong heroes and the wrong leaders. It also shows—and very painfully—that we ourselves were flabby and weak because we refused to take them seriously and let them get as far as they have got. We were so busy with our own little affairs—we were fighting so desperately among ourselves for more plunder and for more colonies and to decide which politician or labour leader should run the show—we just had to close our eyes to what all of us knew was coming. And I think that all our indifference was owing to our own lack of good leadership. It was old Gresham's law repeating itself for the so many hundredth time. Bad money, unless you watch it like a hawk, will drive out good money, bad manners will drive out good manners, bad music will drive out good music, and bad heroes, unless you get rid of them in time, will drive out good leaders. I apologize for this sermon. We have threshed all this out before—Plato—Confucius—

Montaigne; it has become the eternal subject of almost all our dinners. And look at what we have got—the worst mess of all times. And believe me, it is going to be much worse before it gets any better, and I sometimes doubt whether it is not much too late now to do anything about it and whether it will ever get any better.”

Frits stopped and looked at us a bit apologetically. But Lucie took up where he had left off. She was somewhat older than the rest of us, and in many ways she belonged to a bygone age—out of preference, for her mind was perpetually young.

“Yes,” she said, “it was very different when I was a girl. Everything was so much less complicated. And we were still very simple when it came to our heroes. Of course, we had them and lots of them, too, but we took them for granted, just as we still took it for granted that our parents knew best. Perhaps they didn’t always know best. Sometimes they were probably quite wrong. But on the whole, the system seemed to work. God was in His heaven, the king was in his palace, the burgomaster was in the town hall, and when Papa took his nap after a hard day’s work, all of us children kept very quiet. My grandchildren go right on doing whatever they happen to be doing when Grandma puts her palette aside for a moment and tries to catch forty winks. When told to hush, they answer that if it were not for Grandma, they never would have been born, and so Grandma has only herself to blame when her slumbers are interrupted by her grandchildren, or words to that effect. As for the burgomaster and the Queen and God, they will ask you, ‘Who put them there? We did, didn’t we? And therefore we have a right to send them packing when we don’t like the way they run things.’ I suppose that they are right, and since the whole world has now gone Bolshevik, why not? But I am afraid that it makes life rather complicated for the rest of us, the old ones who were accustomed to the other and simpler arrangement.”

Jimmie, being a good conservative of the American school of the nineties of the last century, wasn’t particularly interested either one way or the other. She identified ‘liberalism’ with Greenwich Village, where she had spent a great many years of her life, and quite naturally did not like it. It meant people who were careless about shaving and paying their grocery bills. Jimmie paid hers five minutes after they were dropped into her letter-box.

As for myself, as usual I had not been quite able to make up my mind. My old weakness—my love for the middle of the road—was preventing me from taking sides in too definite a way. I was like Erasmus. I felt attracted towards the Lutheran way of thinking, but I wanted to combine the Lutheran way of thinking with the more polished popish way of living, and while I realized that the dear old Mother, Home, and Heaven

trinity of thirty years before was no longer taken seriously by most members of the younger generation, I had little love for that philosophy of Myself and Nothing Else which had replaced it. Half a century of digging among the ruins of the past had made me painfully familiar with the feet of clay which were buried deeply in the sands of time and which only too often supported the magnificent superstructure of some of the statues erected to our departed gods and half-gods.

But, on the other hand, where should we have been—yes, where should we be to-day—unless occasionally there had been feet of granite, willing and able to carry their owners into the realm of the unknown and find new roads towards progress? The answer was—nowhere at all. We needed those *voortrekkers*, as our South African cousins used to call them. We needed a few stout hearts to do the pioneering. Without those men and women who trekked ahead of the rest of the crowd and either found new grazing fields or died in the attempt, no one of us would ever have got very far. We should have been obliged to stick to the swampy coastal regions, where we had lived and died until then, since the beginning of time, and we should never have known what lay hidden beyond the distant mountain ranges.

To-day, of course, the physical world has been thoroughly investigated and opened up, but that was only a beginning. In spite of all our marvelous technical achievements, we are still cave-men riding around in little gasoline-driven cars. It is true that we now can soar like the birds, but as long as we still behave towards each other with the brutality of wild animals, we might just as well have stayed where we were. The entire realm of what I would like to call 'the human decencies' still remains to be conquered. And in order to give our youngsters the courage needed to continue the work of spiritual exploration, we must show them what some of our physical heroes have been and what they have done. Otherwise (and here old Gresham is back with us again), for lack of good and dependable and trustworthy leaders, the youngsters in their despair may feel tempted to follow the phony heroes who have now got such a hold on their imagination. For youth can no more live without some kind of hero than it can without its daily supply of fresh air and vitamins.

That very morning something in the newspapers had once more brought all this back to my mind and in very vivid terms. For years the youth of Germany had been organizing itself into so-called 'suicide squads' which had undertaken to conquer the Swiss mountains once again, but this time by routes which all honest mountaineers knew to be impassable. However, for Führer and *Vaterland* these poor idiots must do the impossible. Never mind if they were sure to lose their lives in the attempt.

Others would follow in their footsteps, inspired with the same desire to conquer or die for their beloved Leader. And the Leader, by offering a special medal (in bronze and retailing at twelve-and-sixpence a gross), was doing all he could to encourage this lunacy and to keep it going. For what other name could we bestow upon an undertaking that was not only devoid of all practical purpose (there was an easy road to the top of most of those pinnacles and often even some kind of hotel on the top), but one that had long since lost all connexion with the noble sport of mountaineering?

But the poor misguided youngsters had kept on coming, for if one of them should ever succeed, his name would be in all the German papers as another shining example of the do-and-die philosophy of the new and glorious Nazi dispensation.

The story printed that morning in all the papers was an account of four Nazi boys who had started out to scale a perpendicular wall, four thousand feet high and covered entirely with a thin layer of ice. It could only be done by means of iron spikes hammered into the rocks, which thereupon made some kind of ladder. Every Swiss guide had warned against it. Every good and honest mountaineer had denounced it as sheer folly. But the four had departed skyward, singing lustily about Horst Wessel and loudly cheering their beloved hero, Adolf Schicklgruber.

Towards evening the people in the valley had lifted their eyes towards the mountain and by means of their telescopes they had seen how the four men, for lack of enough space to lie down, had tied themselves to their iron spikes and were preparing to spend the night standing on their feet. A second day and night had been spent the same way. On the morning of the third day one of the four had slipped. The rope had caught his companion right above him and had almost decapitated the victim. This had thrown the third one off his balance. He had dashed his brains out against the side of the wall, and this had left the fourth one still alive but firmly fastened to the corpses of his former companions.

On the morning of the fourth day the survivor still seemed to be breathing. A party of Swiss guides had thereupon decided to risk their own necks to bring this fool back to the valley. After Herculean labours they had at last got to a spot from where they could touch him. But just before they could throw him a rope, his strength had given out and, together with his three dead comrades, he had slipped into the abyss.

By great good luck, the Swiss guides had found their way back to the valley. But four young lives had been lost—had been deliberately thrown away—and an almost superhuman amount of strength and energy had been squandered upon an enterprise that not only lacked every practical



MOUNTAINEERING, THE NOBLEST OF ALL SPORTS



purpose but which, even by the widest stretch of the imagination, could not possibly be connected with a real sporting venture.

Then why this absurd manifestation of courage of the wrong sort and this reckless playing with human lives? Merely to show the rest of the world that the Germans, the master race, were the *Herrenvolk* to whom nothing was impossible.

And what had actually been accomplished? Were we ordinary mortals impressed? By no means! We were merely disgusted, but our disgust was explained away as a manifestation of 'physical softness' and 'physical cowardice'—mixed with jealousy at not being endowed with the same spirit of high adventure which was to make the Nazis the rulers of the world.

I had read that story—a well-written story, too—and then I had thought of my good friends of the hospice on top of the pass of the St Bernard. I had often visited them and had come to know them quite well. Ever since the year 962 these monks had been living there, more than eight thousand feet up in the air, amid their snow-covered peaks in a little sheltered valley on the road from Italy to Europe. A nice place to visit on a pleasant day in August, but a hopelessly bleak and desolate spot during at least eight months of the year. But every year before the digging of the great transalpine tunnels, these good monks had taken care of more than twenty thousand travellers, had fed them and given them a place to sleep, and on countless occasions had saved their lives by digging them out of the avalanches that for ever descended upon this ancient mountain pass.

And what was the reward that awaited them after twenty or thirty years spent in this lonely wilderness? I know exactly what awaited these Augustinian fathers, once their strength had given out and their hearts had gone back on them. They were sent back to the valley to die, and after they had been laid out, their bodies would disappear into a nameless grave.

But in spite of these hardships there never had been a lack of eager candidates for this life of self-sacrifice and devotion. During the hundreds of years the monastery of the Great St Bernard had existed there always had been a plentiful number of young men willing to give up everything the rest of us consider worth while and bury themselves amidst the snows of the western Alps that they might be of service to their fellow-men. And why? Because they, like those four Nazi boys who had been killed in the Bernese Oberland, had heeded the voice of a leader. But what a difference whether the name of that Leader was Adolf Hitler or Jesus Christ!



THE HOSPICE OF ST BERNARD AMID THE ENDLESS SNOWS OF WINTER

We had continued to talk along this line for almost the whole of the rest of the afternoon and, in the end, we had decided that we would do what we had been talking about earlier in the day. We would invite a few of the heroes of our youth. I had made a bid for Fridtjof Nansen, the great Norwegian explorer, and Frits had asked to be allowed to ask three men, known to every Dutch child—Jakob van Heemskerk, Willem Barents, and Surgeon de Veer, the leaders of the famous Dutch Arctic expedition of the year 1596.

It was easy to think up a meal for these guests. They had been simple folk, not accustomed to elaborate fare. I shall ever remember that enormous jar—almost a small-sized barrel—of mutton which I had seen standing in the galley of the *Fram*, the last time I was in Oslo.

I have always detested mutton with a most particular horror, but apparently Nansen and his comrades had lived quite happily on a regular diet of seal and, as an occasional delicacy, a bit of this embalmed mutton. Just one or two very small lamb chops—well, those I could tolerate if they were served with a sauce that hid their sheepy taste. But that enormous tin can holding what seemed to me fifty pounds of preserved mutton—it had given me a very clear insight into the hopeless monotony of that endless voyage of those occupants of the *Fram*. And knowing something too about the fare upon which the early Dutch polar explorers had subsisted I felt that almost anything we might serve our guests would be welcome.

Which, of course, did not mean that we, as hosts, should be deficient in the care with which we prepared our meal. But it would be better to keep everything as simple as possible, and this is the menu I gave Jo for the coming Saturday.

First of all, there was to be a bean soup, made according to a recipe of our own Gouverneur Morris, a gentleman of the old school who owed a great deal of his success as a statesman to his knowledge of good food. Here is that recipe as it was given to me by one of his descendants.

#### *Bean Soup à la Gouverneur Morris*

Put two cups of beans to soak in water to cover at night. The next morning put them into a pot with one teaspoonful of salt and two quarts of water. Bring to the boil and simmer slowly for an hour. Then add six carrots, two turnips, and one parsnip, scraped and cut into small even pieces. Let the soup simmer for three or four hours, skimming when necessary. When the vegetables are soft, press the whole through a colander and return to the pot. Scrape and cut four stalks of celery into small pieces and add to the soup. Let simmer until

tender. If the soup gets too thick, add enough boiling water to make of proper consistency. Cut four slices of bread into small pieces, toast, and turn over and over in butter. Pour the soup over this and serve.

After that, just plain, ordinary roast beef, prepared in the regular Dutch style, with a lot of vegetables on the side and plenty of gravy. For dessert, one of Jo's excellent puddings with raspberry sauce and large cups of coffee and all the fresh fruit we could get. There is nothing that makes quite as much for good conversation after a pleasant meal as lots of fresh fruit and an abundance of nuts and candies of all sorts. Not to forget the large jar of ginger which these last two hundred years has always been found on every respectable Dutch dinner-table after everything else has been removed.

Music or no music? Would our guests care for it? Jimmie doubted. Frits was neutral. Lucie thought in the affirmative. Then I remembered something else I had noticed on board the *Fram*. In the long room I had seen an old-fashioned musical-box, one of those tinkly affairs that was worked by means of a metal cylinder and that played three short tunes—three Norwegian melodies.

A few of my readers may remember these curious contraptions from their childhood days—those absurd ka-plink-ka-plankety-plunk thingumbobs, endlessly repeating *Ach, du lieber Augustin*, *Jeanie with the Light Brown Hair*, and *Yankee Doodle*. That (or rather the Norwegian equivalent of these popular melodies) was all the people of the *Fram* had had to break the monotony of their long polar nights. All the same, that absurd musical-box had served its purpose. When the silence of the eternal snows had become unbearable, these plinkety-plank tunes had given them the relief they needed to prevent them from flying at each other's throats for some trifling act or word.

I knew, however, that Nansen had been a man of wide cultivation, and any of Beethoven's symphonies would have done for him, except that Beethoven symphonies are not exactly the sort of music one usually serves with the soup. And I thought that it might perhaps be better to start with a few short pieces of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One of them was Johann Kuhnau's 'Biblical' Sonata called *David and Goliath's Combat*, of which I had had a private recording made one evening when Castagnetta was playing it for us and when she had made David throw his sling-shot with more than usual vigour. For the benefit of the Dutch skippers I added Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck's *Fantasia in Echo Style*, a piece full of tricks and queer tonal effects but admirably suited to the taste of honest sailors of four hundred years ago. That and Johann Pezel's *Fünf-stimmige blasende Musik* would probably be

sufficient. Should they want more, we had by this time such a collection of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century melodies that we could not possibly run short.

Then for Frits' benefit I wrote a short story about the lives of our heroes.

Fridtjof Nansen. The very name depicts the man. It stands out like a Norwegian mountain peak rising abruptly from the snowfields at its base.

Nansen was born near Oslo in October of the year 1861. He went to the local school, did a lot of ski-ing, and finally enrolled at the University of Oslo to study zoology. He did a lot more ski-ing and at the age of twenty-one joined a sailing-vessel that went to Greenland, getting in this way a bit of first-hand information about life on the ocean and his first glimpse of the Arctic.

After his return to the civilized world Nansen continued his studies, got the inevitable Ph.D., and began to prepare for one of the most fantastic of all polar voyages, at least from the point of view of the late eighties of the last century. He decided to travel on snowshoes and skis from the east coast of Greenland to the west coast, so that at last there would be some definite knowledge about the interior of the great white continent. Together with Otto Sverdrup (who afterwards was to command the *Fram*), two other scientists, and two Lapps, he sailed for Greenland in May 1888. In August these men disappeared from view and climbed to the top of the frozen plateau which is the roof of Greenland. After six weeks of trekking through this snow desert at an altitude of almost nine thousand feet, the party safely reached the west coast of Greenland, from where it returned to Norway in the spring of the next year. The problem of Greenland had been settled, and the name of Nansen as a most efficient leader of a polar expedition had been established.

In 1890 Nansen was ready for another walking trip, but this time he was a great deal more ambitious. First of all he intended to build himself a vessel sufficiently strong to withstand the pressure of the polar ice, for he knew that most previous voyages had come to grief because the vessels that had been used had been smashed like walnuts under a giant's heel. Having got hold of such a craft, he would thereupon entrust his floating fortress to the same Arctic current which had carried relics of the ill-fated American *Jeannette* expedition all the way from the New Siberian Islands to the coast of Greenland. First of all he would take his ship to these New Siberian Islands (where the *Jeannette* had foundered, just north of the mouth of the Lena River) and would let nature take its course. If his calculations were right, the vessel would drift pretty close to the Pole and if it should be found that it did not get quite as far northward as he

hoped, he intended to hop off at the nearest point to latitude 0 and do the rest of the voyage on foot. Walking and ski-ing and climbing had always been his favourite sports, and a couple of hundred miles more or less meant very little to him.

Nansen explained his plan to his Norwegian colleagues and laid it most respectfully before the Royal Geographical Society of London. Without exception the old-school Arctic explorers told him that it could not possibly be done, and, greatly encouraged by their doubt, Nansen returned to Christiania (Oslo to us) and began making preparations for his voyage.

He had a ship specially built, with its sides constructed in such a way as to withstand ice-pressure, and called it the *Fram* (*Forward*). Then, as now, money was the beginning and the end of all scientific expeditions. But for this once, the Norwegian Parliament (not unaware of the publicity value of such an undertaking) felt inclined to do something to help the good cause along, and the rest of the funds were obtained from the king and a few private individuals.

Otto Sverdrup, Nansen's companion during the trip across Greenland, was chosen to act as master of the *Fram*. Nine other men, consisting of officers, sailors, engineers, and stokers, were put under his command. These Norwegians had been most carefully selected, for it takes not only extraordinary physical strength but tremendous will-power to live rationally through so many years in the Arctic, and Nansen figured that he would need at least three years to reach the coast of Greenland.

In June of the year 1893 the *Fram* slowly chug-chugged out of Oslo Fjord. Late in September she was fastened to an ice floe near the New Siberian Islands, and the famous drift began. In March 1895, two years after she had left Norway, the *Fram* reached her highest latitude. During all this time, not a single square inch of land had been sighted, but constant soundings had proved that the Arctic Ocean was much deeper than had been expected, sometimes going as far down as two thousand fathoms.

Finding that the northward trek of his ship had definitely come to an end, Nansen decided to make his dash for the Pole. As it would not be possible for him to locate his ship in the drifting ice, he told Sverdrup that he would make for Spitsbergen as soon as he had succeeded or had failed in locating the Pole. For his companion he chose the strongest man on board, one with the not-unusual Norse name of Johansen.

On March 14, 1895, the two pilgrims, with their dogs, sledges, skins, and kayaks, left the *Fram* at 84° N., 102° E. (look it up on your atlas), and on April 8 they reached 86° 14' N., the nearest spot to the Pole ever before reached by anyone not a bear or a fox.

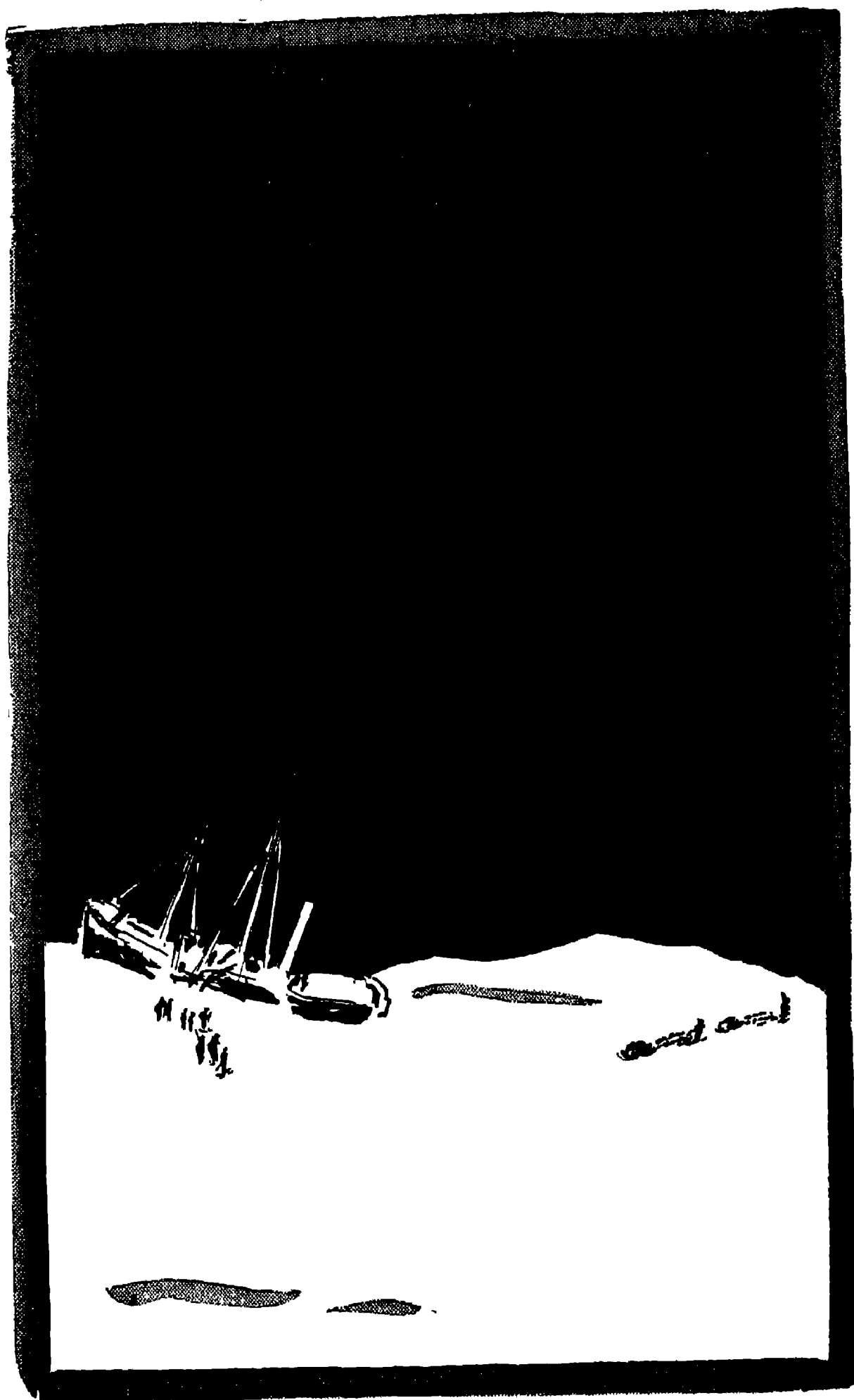
Nansen was primarily a scientist, and, since he was not provided with

a contract for a syndicated story of *My Dash to the Pole*, he was a free agent. He realized that if he wanted to return to Franz Josef Land before it was too late he must return at once. And so, within easy walking distance from the Pole, he turned his back upon the object of his desire, which in itself showed greater strength of character than is found in most explorers.

After heartbreaking months spent in the trackless icy wilds surrounding the Pole the two men finally reached the northernmost island of the Franz Josef group. There they built themselves a small snow house, using their silken tent as a roof, and made ready to pass the winter in about as much discomfort as any two human beings have ever experienced for quite such a long period of time. Their food consisted of bear and walrus meat, cooked over a blubber lamp, but somehow they managed to keep alive, and never did they know a day of sickness. Late in the spring of the year 1896 they packed their few remaining belongings on their backs and moved southward.

And now, you will ask, what did all this mean to me and why was I so much interested in the adventures of these two wanderers?

In the year 1896 I was fourteen years old and beginning to outgrow my first hero, the famous minstrel of a Dutch boys' magazine who could do all things and do all of them well. I badly needed some one else to worship—some other outstanding personality who would fill my lonely soul with awe and admiration and who would make me feel that the drab and unimaginative existence of a small and unimaginative Dutch town was not the beginning and the end of existence. And there was this magnificent-looking Norwegian (I was a shrimp in those days, lean from many years of sickness, and very bad at sports and none too good either at my school-work), and he and his few companions were somewhere up there—away up north—lost among the endless snowfields of the Arctic. Perhaps they were still alive. More likely they had long since died from hunger and cold, for this was the third year since they had been last heard from, and not a single word had trickled down from the great frozen spaces able to give us the slightest hint about their ultimate fate. Being endowed with a certain amount of imagination and having since early childhood read every book on polar expeditions I could lay my hands on, I could paint myself a pretty accurate picture of the last days and hours of these intrepid explorers. The truth about the ill-fated Franklin expedition had only revealed itself in my father's days, and he still remembered the shock of horror that had swept across the civilized world when it was discovered that every one of that crew of a hundred and twenty-nine officers and men of Sir John Franklin had starved to death, long after they had reached the coast of northern Canada. Being familiar with all the pictures that



NANSEN LEAVES THE "FRAM"



had been published of the cairns (hiding the last news of the *Erebus* and the *Terror*) and the pots and pans containing the remnants of human bones (for in the end it had become a case of sailor eat sailor), I could now see the men of the *Fram* as they struggled bravely towards the safety of the south, devouring their last dog and finally attacking and killing each other.

And then, in the early part of August of the year 1896, there arrived a brief telegram from Vardö (I shall never forget the name of that little town near the Murmansk peninsula) telling a jubilant world that Nansen was safe and that he and Johansen had been found near Franz Josef Land by an Englishman named Jackson, who had gone to that distant island on a scientific expedition financed by the late Lord Northcliffe. Just in the nick of time, too, for they were on the point of starvation. But they were safe. They were even then on their way to the Norwegian capital in the yacht *Otaria*, which they had boarded on leaving Jackson's good ship, the *Windward*, at Hammerfest, but they were full of anxiety about their comrades on the *Fram*, from whom not a word had been heard these last three years.

They could not know it, but on that selfsame day—August 13, 1896—the *Fram* had at last set itself free from the ice floes of the north and was now peacefully sailing southward with every member of its crew in perfect health. A few days later at Tromsø, the old shipmates were once more united and were proceeding to Christiania and to such honours as never before had been bestowed upon a group of men who had long since been given up as lost.

I had lived through all those episodes as if I had been an actual participant in those magnificent adventures, and as soon as Nansen's *Farthest North* had been translated into Dutch, I got hold of it and though I did not understand most of the scientific data with which the two volumes were crammed full, I missed none of the dramatic incidents leading up to that morning when Nansen, realizing that the end was near, had suddenly heard a shot, had climbed to the top of a small knoll of ice, and had found himself face to face with a white man—Frederick Jackson in search of his daily seal steak.

After that I had lost sight of Nansen for a great many years. I knew that he had continued his scientific career and that he had taken part in a great many other and rather important expeditions, studying ocean depths and currents and suchlike matters which afterwards became embalmed in very dull scientific publications, but in the year 1905 his name once more became connected with a human-interest story. That was on the occasion of the separation of Norway from Sweden. After the end of the Napoleonic wars the King of Sweden, the famous French

general Bernadotte, had been rewarded for his betrayal of his former friend, General Bonaparte, by being given the crown of Norway. Norway for the last four centuries had been under Danish domination. Denmark, however, had to be punished for having remained faithful to Napoleon. The King of Sweden had also become King of Norway. The Bernadottes (let this be said to their everlasting credit) had followed a very moderate and sensible course and had been quite successful at their difficult task of running their two kingdoms simultaneously. Gradually, however, the Norwegians had come of age (both economically and politically), until at last they wanted to be masters in their own home and began to clamour for independence. In any other part of the world, such an issue would have led to bloodshed. But these highly civilized nations had sufficiently outgrown their antediluvian instincts to know that a war between them would be worse than wicked—it would be foolish. And so they had bade each other farewell with perhaps a certain amount of personal resentment but without any lasting feeling of mutual ill-will.

During this crisis Nansen, the former explorer, had played a most useful rôle as mediator and counsellor of patience. He had summed up the situation with great and good common sense: if, in any such union between two nations, one of them feels that it is not getting a square deal—he had argued—then why continue a situation that can only lead to constant friction? Why not separate peacefully and each go his own way?

As soon as the union between Norway and Sweden had been formally dissolved, Nansen had been chosen to represent the new kingdom in London as the first Norwegian Minister. Three years later, after things had quietened down, he had gone back to his scientific labours and up to the outbreak of the first World War had been fully occupied with his writing and with occasional expeditions to the northern seas. During the war itself he again had become representative at large of the Norwegian people to the rest of the civilized world. He had gone to America to see to it that Norway received those supplies that were essential to its existence, and as soon as the Armistice had been declared, he had accepted a commission from the League of Nations to repatriate half a million prisoners of war which the old Tsarist Government had gradually accumulated in Siberia.

When Russia had collapsed Nansen had established a relief committee (after the Hoover pattern) to feed the hungry Russian millions. At the same time he had headed that department of the League of Nations which took charge of the people (now turning up in every part of the world) who had lost their citizenship in one country and had not been allowed to acquire it in another. When Mussolini, in an early outburst of megalomania, bombarded the Greek island of Corfu, it was Nansen who had had

the courage to protest, in the meetings of the League, against this act of savagery. Indeed, if there had been a dozen Nansens or even half a dozen in Geneva, the ill-starred League might have amounted to something. But Geneva had soon degenerated into a stronghold of dilatoriness and complacency and correct diplomatic behaviour, until it collapsed through its own inherent weakness, rather than through any efforts on the part of its enemies.

Even then Nansen had not given up his indomitable faith in mankind, and, returning to Oslo, he had continued his labours for his fellow-men, without any thought of self.

Fridtjof Nansen died in May of the year 1930. He had a happy death. He went to sleep and never woke up. That magnificent engine which had so faithfully served him through so many years at last gave out. The little spark which sixty-nine years before had been borrowed from nature's limitless reservoir of energy was once more surrendered to its original source. But the work it had accomplished continues to make itself felt, and in this age of little men (and was there ever such a dearth of truly great leaders to-day?) we notice with painful clarity how much we lost when this public-spirited citizen of the world ceased to bother the pin-headed politicians of the post-war era by giving an example of completely unselfish leadership. Fridtjof Nansen was the sort of man who would have been ideally suited to act as the commander not merely of polar expeditions, but of expeditions infinitely more difficult, complicated, and dangerous than those to the frozen north. I refer to those excursions into the realm of applied politics, which so far have rarely produced anything but rank failure because they were entrusted to the wrong kinds of commanders.

And now we are in Amsterdam, and it is early in the month of November of the year of our Lord 1596. The town has at last taken the side of the Prince of Orange and has joined the rebellion against the King of Spain. The city is humming with business, for now one can once more trade wherever and with whomever one wishes. The whole world has become the oyster of these expert fishermen of the North Sea, and pearls are to be found in many of the bivalves which until then have been considered the exclusive property of His Most Catholic Majesty, the sour-faced Philip of evil memory.

Of course, one must accept the good with the bad. Mercurius, a most undependable deity, kept joggling his scales in a most unpredictable manner. To-day he would cause the ruin of half a dozen men who until then had been regarded as pillars of the Stock Exchange, and to-morrow he would drop millions into the laps of a brace of fly-by-night speculators

who, until then, hadn't had a pot in which to cook their daily porridge. Only last year one of the most promising of ventures—one that seemed to be absolutely foolproof—had turned out to be a sad failure. It was true that most of the money had been provided not by private individuals but by the town of Amsterdam itself, but in the end that was pretty much the same, for the citizens would have to recoup the magistrates for their losses by paying extra taxes. Nobody, however, felt inclined to grumble, for if the expedition had been successful, as the most learned geographers of the day had predicted that it must be, the United Netherlands would have had a route of their own to China and to the Indies and would have been the richest nation in the world.

At that moment the route to the Indies was still in the hands of the Spaniards and the Portuguese, who brooked no rivalry. But if the Hollanders could discover a passage north of Asia from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the merchants of the Low Countries would no longer be obliged to go to Lisbon for their spices and silks and, instead of being middlemen, they would deal at the source, which often meant a net profit of three or four hundred per cent.

Two ships had therefore been equipped to try the North-eastern Passage by way of Cape Chelyuskin. That route was fairly well known as far as the strait which separated the island of Novaya Zemlya from the Russian mainland. That strait held a great fascination for the Amsterdam city fathers. For a strait was a narrow opening from one sea into another. Once you had fortified it with a couple of guns, you could close it to all outsiders and you had got hold of a nice little monopoly of your own.

The medieval ideal of monopolistic control as the only sound source of commercial profit still spooked around in the heads of these sixteenth-century traders, and they stocked their two ships well with cannon of different calibre and hopefully put their skippers in charge of a cargo of trade goods which might prove attractive to the heathen Chinese. As the vessel which penetrated farthest north was destroyed, the pieces of ordnance proved a complete loss. But it is typical of the sense of order and loyalty of these old sailors that, shipwrecked as they were, they returned in their open boats with all the merchandise that had been entrusted to their care. They might lose their lives, but business was business, and a trust was a trust.

The two ships selected for this venture were small and not particularly seaworthy, but who wanted to risk new vessels on so hazardous an undertaking? One of them (the smaller one) was under command of Captain Jan Corneliszoon de Rijp. The other was entrusted to Jakob van Heemskerk.

This Jakob van Heemskerk was a man of tried ability. He belonged

to an excellent family, and in the year 1595 members of good families rarely took to the sea. It was not considered nice. Heemskerk was the exception. He had been well educated, was as good a scientist as they came in his day; furthermore he already had had some experience in sailing the Arctic sea.

But the real hero of the expedition was a certain Willem Barents. A native of Terschelling, one of the North Sea islands, just north of the province of Holland, he had started life as a cabin boy and had therefore come up the hard way. He had been north twice before and knew more about the coast of Siberia than anyone else whom the Amsterdam burgo-masters could have hired.

I imagine him as a rather small man, stockily built, with a square sailor's beard, and slow but sure in all his movements. A pious and God-fearing old skipper with a strong streak of conservatism in his make-up. This streak of conservatism showed itself when he was proved to be dead wrong in some of his calculations about the return of the sun. During many centuries this error greatly puzzled the scientific commentators upon the famous voyage of 1596. How could as careful a mathematician as old Willem Barents have been so far amiss in his figuring? Until it dawned upon them that Willem Barents, who had grown up under the so-called 'old calendar,' had refused to accept the 'new calendar' which was then beginning to be accepted by all modern-minded navigators as the only reliable time-schedule.

But that same quality of obstinacy proved to be of the greatest value after his ship had been wrecked in the ice of the Kara Sea. Without a leader of his calibre to guide them through their disastrous experiences, it is highly doubtful whether any of his shipmates would ever have lived to tell the tale of their adventures. And so, bless old Willem's stout heart, for though he himself left his bones on Russia's bleak shores, the others got safely home, and that is about the highest praise one can pay to the commander of any expedition that comes to grief.

There was still one other member of the ship's staff who should be mentioned. That was the doctor (or barber-surgeon, as he was then called), a certain Gerrit de Veer. He was a Jack-of-all-trades and, furthermore, a cheerful and optimistic soul who well deserves the fame he gained as the official chronicler of this early invasion of the frozen north. It was he who forced the men to pay at least a minimum of attention to their personal hygiene, and to take daily exercise when they themselves would have preferred to spend the whole of the winter sitting in front of the fire of their little wooden hut. It was he—their doctor—who told them to eat moss when scurvy began to make its dread appearance. Also, being a musician of sorts (he himself played the flute), it was de Veer who

organized those amateur theatricals which did so much to keep up the morale of seventeen men forced to spend an entire winter cooped up in a small wooden house and condemned to months of idleness.

Without any difficulty, the two vessels reached the Arctic Ocean. Once there, de Rijp and Barents disagreed upon the course to follow. Barents wanted to go due north-east while de Rijp favoured a more western course. When two Dutch skippers disagree firmly upon any point (whether it be a point of the compass or the best way to stow away their barrels of beer or fill a pipe), there is only one thing for them to do—each one must work out his own salvation according to his own best judgment. The two skippers therefore bade each other farewell, de Rijp going northward and Barents holding to that eastern course which after a few weeks' sailing was to make him the discoverer of Spitsbergen, the land of the ragged mountains. From Spitsbergen, Barents and Heemskerk sailed once more in an eastern direction until they reached the coast of Novaya Zemlya. They followed it northward, rounded Cape Mauritius, and counted themselves very fortunate when they beheld the open waters of the Kara Sea. From here, as they had been told by the Amsterdam map-makers, it would be only a short and easy distance to Cape Chelyuskin, where the Asiatic mainland reached its northernmost point and from where they could sail due south until they reached China.

But once in the Kara Sea, their troubles began. It was now well within the month of August, and the polar winter was at hand. One morning they woke up to find their ship solidly frozen into the ice. Before the days of dynamite (used in 1896 to set the *Fram* free) it was impossible to dig a channel through which a vessel could thereupon proceed to the nearest open water. Heemskerk and Barents discussed the situation and came to the conclusion that they had been trapped. They must prepare to spend the winter in the Arctic and try their luck next spring.

It was the first time the white man had been forced to face the hardships of the long polar night. I think that the most delightful part of the whole voyage lies in the complete co-operation between the two men who headed the expedition. The younger man, in nominal command, tactfully and gracefully conceded to the greater wisdom and experience of his older subordinate. There never was any friction, but such harmonious understanding that in all subsequent accounts of the voyage (and de Veer's book became an international best-seller which maintained itself for many centuries) Willem Barents is accepted as the actual leader of the expedition.

They now had to prepare for six months of hibernation. They realized that the ship must be given up as a complete loss. It would be destroyed by the ever-increasing pressure of the ice. Therefore the wood might as

well be used for the construction of a house large enough to give shelter to sixteen men. The ship's carpenter (most inconsiderately) died just after the floor had been laid, but in the sixteenth century every sailor was also more or less of a carpenter and could handle an axe or a knife as cleverly as a professional woodworker, and the labour of construction continued.

The vessel had found refuge in a small bay on the north-eastern coast of Novaya Zemlya. That seemed as good a spot for the house as any other, and there it was built and there it has remained ever since. There was a plentiful supply of wood, for not only could the ship be dismantled, but the currents running westward from the coast of northern Siberia (the same currents which Nansen used three hundred years later for his dash to the Pole on the *Fram*) had carried a large number of dead trees to the east coast of Novaya Zemlya. It was hard work to drag these from the shore inland, and as two of the men were too sick to do any manual labour, the others had to do everything.

The roof offered the greatest difficulties. The sailors solved the problem by constructing a flat frame across which they spread one of the ship's sails. This they weighted down with a layer of sand. Then the Lord obligingly covered the sand with snow. Soon the snow became ice, and the roof remained perfect until the rains of spring melted it away.

They had no stones for a chimney, but most of the men remembered the peasant farms of their childhood days, when the fire burned in the middle of the floor and when the smoke went up and out through a hole in the roof. They knew enough about air currents to give that hole in the roof greater drawing power by using an old barrel as a chimney-pot. But their knowledge of ventilation did not go quite far enough. Indeed, on one occasion, during the heavy blizzards of January, some of the brighter lads hit upon the idea of increasing the indoor temperature by filling up the chimney with pillows and then using some of the ship's precious coal instead of the usual driftwood to get a hotter kind of fire. As a result, the whole expedition was almost asphyxiated. Fortunately, Chirurgeon de Veer—always on the job—woke up just in time and had sense enough to kick the door open. After that they never again indulged in such foolish experiments, but lay in their bunks and shivered.

However, from time to time they were made to get up. Their inventive barber had constructed a steam bath out of an old beer barrel, and everybody was obliged to use it at least once a week. The men slept in bunks erected along the southern side of the house. Barents, who was in bad health, was given a special bed by the side of the fire to the right of their dinner-table, which also held the hour-glass. In addition to this hour-glass, they had a regular clock which showed that the men who had



CROSS-SECTION OF THE "SAFE SHELTER"



equipped the ship had been quite modern in their ideas. In the year 1596 few ships went to sea carrying a clock. Since one was supposed to sail by God and by guess, a little extra guessing did not really matter, and besides the poor expeditionary clock soon gave up the ghost. How could it have survived? During half of the day its innards were roasted and during the other half they were frozen stiff, and no clock then constructed could stand such outrageous treatment. After their clock had given up its ticking ghost, they had to depend upon the hour-glass to know what day and what week it was, and one man was constantly on guard with no other duty than to turn the glass when it had run its course.

The cabin was illuminated by a single oil lamp suspended from the middle of the ceiling, and a large iron pot full of water was placed in the middle of the fire. This filled the room with a certain amount of moisture and provided the men with hot water for their soup. When everything had been finished, the dwelling was officially baptized the Safe Shelter (*Behouden Huis* in Dutch), and the sailors moved in.

Then the long siege began.

December came with an uninterrupted series of blizzards. Soon the snowdrifts outside reached up to the roof, and the men had to tunnel their way outside whenever they wanted to bring in fresh firewood.

At first they were greatly disturbed by the foxes, who, attracted by the pleasant odours of cooking (escaping through the barrel on the roof that served as a chimney), came galloping across the roof. But soon the sailors found that this was a very convenient arrangement, for now they need not go very far outside to set their traps, and within a week they had a plentiful supply of fox-skins. They needed these not only for coats and hats but also for footwear. The shoes they had brought with them from Holland had become useless. They had so often been soaking wet and thereupon had so frequently been dried out before the open fire that they had cracked wide open. The sailors, however, were clever with their knives. They carved themselves wooden soles out of driftwood and covered these with fox fur, and, as a result, none of them suffered badly from frozen toes during the whole of that long winter—quite a record for an Arctic expedition, especially one of three hundred years ago.

The climax of their suffering was reached on New Year's Day, when for an entire week such a terrific hurricane swept across the island that no one could go out for driftwood, and the inmates of the Safe Shelter were forced to burn some of their home-made furniture to keep warm.

On January 6, the feast of the Magi, the blizzard stopped, but the morale of the men was at a pretty low ebb and the versatile ship's barber thought it would be a good idea to have a little party. The first mate was elected King of Novaya Zemlya, and a special dinner was prepared, and

all the other festivities connected with Three Kings' Day in the home country were carefully observed. The meal, in case the reader is interested, consisted of pancakes and ship's biscuits soaked in hot wine until they were eatable.

And so the long winter went by until once more there was a short glimmer of light on the distant horizon, and the prisoners knew that the worst part of their period of detention would soon be over, and they could start work on the two boats that were to carry them to safety as soon as the sea should be open.

Work in the open proved a great boon to their health, for they had rarely ventured outside of the house during the long months of winter. In January, one more sailor died. He was the last one to be buried on Novaya Zemlya. Finally, early in March, the ice began to break up, but they had to wait until June before they could actually hoist sail and bid a tearful farewell to that staunch little wooden hut which had been their home for such a long time. Before the door was locked and barricaded against bears and foxes, William Barents wrote three letters, giving an account of their adventures. One of these was placed in a powder-horn which was hung in the chimney. It was found there three centuries later, still in a fairly good state of preservation.

Early on the morning of June 13 Willem Barents was carried to the boat, together with one other sailor who was too weak to walk. The course they followed was first of all due north, until they reached the end of their island. From there they went south-west by south until at last they reached the northern coast of Siberia. From that point on, they followed that coast in the hope of reaching the mouth of the White Sea. Barents, although a desperately sick man, now forced to live and sleep in an open boat, never ceased to make the necessary nautical observations. He noted the capes they discovered carefully on his map, and correctly, too, for many of them are to be found to this day under their Dutch names and right there where they should be. After ten more days the sick sailor died, and one morning, old Willem Barents commended his soul to God and quietly slipped off into his final sleep.

At last they reached what must have been the mouth of the White Sea. Their home-made boats leaked very badly. The people in the smaller boat were most of the time sitting waist-deep in water. Their masts had broken, and their rotting sails were full of holes. Whenever they tried to go on shore, they were at once attacked by battalions of hungry polar bears. It was therefore impossible for them to make fires and prepare themselves hot meals. They were all of them on the point of exhaustion, and early in July one more sailor died of what seems to have been pneumonia. A strange detail—even during this desperate flight from death

they still carried those trade goods with them with which they were supposed to have done business with the Chinese, and on the first warm day of summer, by order of Heemskerk, these materials were unpacked and dried that they might be brought back to Amsterdam in as good a condition as possible. Apparently they had never thought of the possibility of using some of this extra baggage to replace their own threadbare wardrobes.

They still had to pass through several other uncomfortable adventures. Owing to the presence of the heavy ironclad boxes which were part of their luggage, their compasses had gone haywire, and without reliable maps they only knew the general direction in which they were supposed to sail if they wanted to get back to civilization, but no precise details were available. A few days later all of them were attacked by scurvy, but on one small island they discovered a lot of scurvy grass (*Cochlearia officinalis*), and that put them back on their feet in no time at all.

And then, finally and at last, they met their first Russian fishing-smacks. The rest of the voyage was comparatively easy, although on one occasion they were still obliged to row for thirty hours at a stretch. In August they reached the Kola Peninsula. There a sudden fog separated the two boats, and for several days they did not know where they were or whether their companions were still alive. The fog lifted, however, before either of the vessels had suffered any serious harm, and together they reached the first Russian settlement, where they were most kindly received, and where they ate their first square meal in more than two months.

And now, while recuperating in that Samoyed village, they were most unexpectedly united with Captain de Rijp. After a useless search up and down the Arctic Ocean, he had finally been blown into the White Sea, where he and his men had spent the winter. De Rijp took his former comrades on board his own vessel, and on October 6 they all bade farewell to their kind Russian hosts, leaving them their two leaky boats as a souvenir. Twenty-three days later they were back home.

As they had long since been given up as lost, their unexpected return created a tremendous commotion. What happened to these men afterwards we do not know. Common sailors are apt to lead anonymous lives. They probably went back to sea as soon as nobody was any longer willing to offer them a couple of glasses of ale in return for a lovely yarn about polar bears as big as horses and mountains of ice as high as a church tower. After that—well, a fellow had to live. So it was back to the ocean waves, to live or die as the case might be. And if it had not been for an enterprising publisher who had persuaded Master de Veer to write down an account of their adventures and sufferings, the whole story of that memorable voyage might have been as completely lost as that of many



THE MEN OF NOVAYA ZEMLYA HAD LIVED SAFELY THROUGH  
THEIR TERRIBLE WINTER

similar trips which were not accompanied by a barber who handled a goose quill as readily as his razor and scalpel.

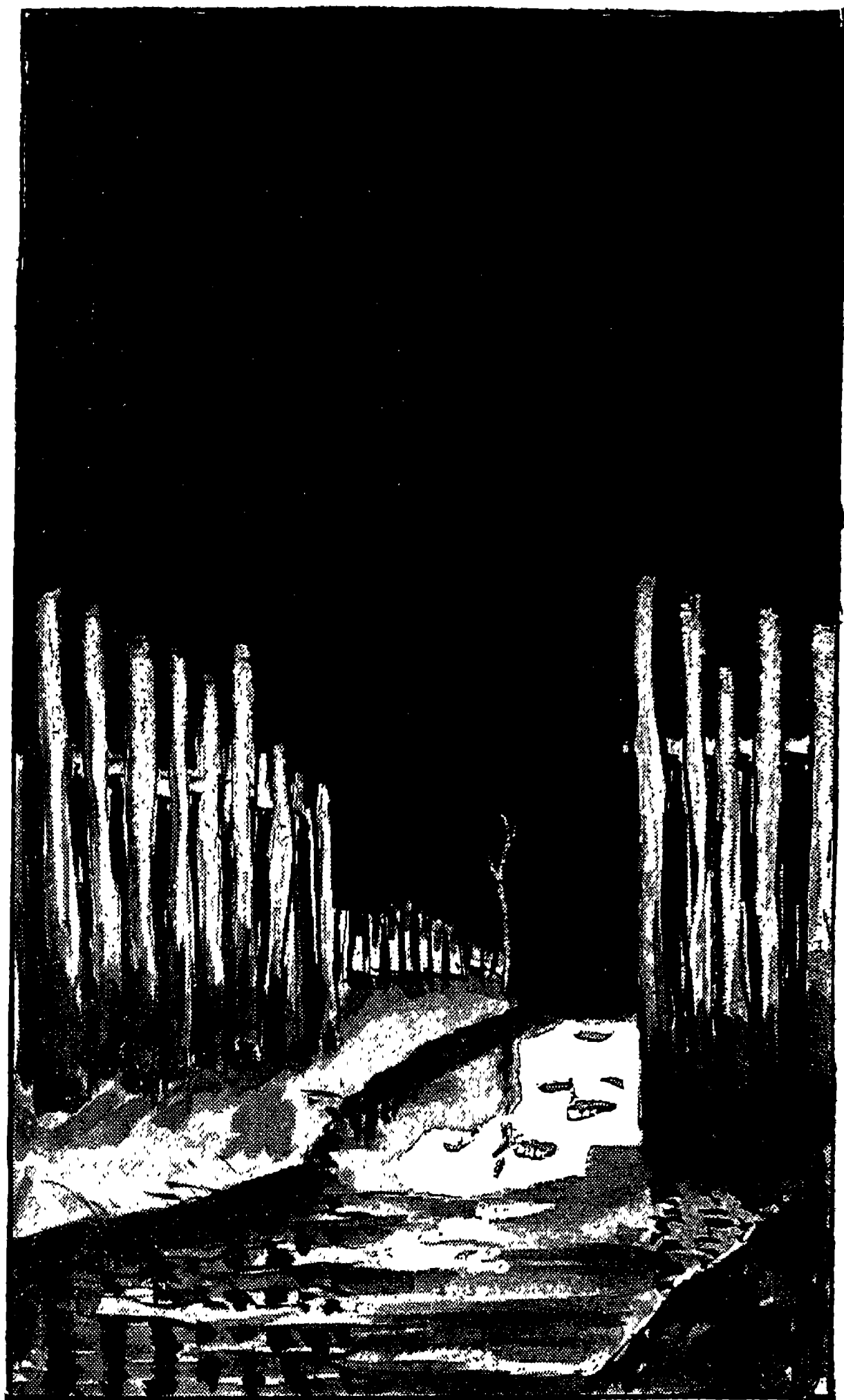
One more word about Jakob van Heemskerk, who so bravely had led his men through all their tribulations and had safely guided them back to their port of departure. He continued to serve his country as commander of a man-of-war. In the year 1607, during an engagement with the Spaniards off Gibraltar, he was shot through the heart and killed.

We had had strange weather all through the year. A very warm and early spring had been followed by a cold and wet summer. But the autumn had been exceptionally warm until almost the last week of November. Then it had turned extremely cold, and we were to experience the hardest winter since 1892. All the canals were frozen over, and even the Scheldt was so densely covered with ice that the ferry service with Noord Beveland had to be suspended, and the few people who insisted upon crossing to the island had to take their chances and go on foot.

As Jimmie insisted on keeping our home in Veere at an even New York temperature, I had escaped from my hothouse study to get my daily modicum of fresh air before I was due at Frits' for dinner. In Veere we did not have much choice when we went out for a short constitutional, and so I wandered towards the canal which connected our town with Middelburg. The locks had not been opened for almost ten days, and the ice on the canal was so solid that people drove their sleighs across it when they wanted to go to town.

There also had been a great deal of skating by the younger part of the population, but it was an exceedingly cold night, and the canal lay deserted. As it was still twenty minutes before seven, I spent a few moments standing on one of the locks, partly to recover my breath (for the temperature was near zero) and also to enjoy the lovely quiet of that frozen evening. Suddenly from behind the bend in the canal I beheld a solitary skater hastening to Veere. He seemed a very powerful man, for although he had to navigate against a strong wind, he proceeded at a rapid clip. His method of skating was not like that of our natives, who had carefully stuck to the old-fashioned and clumsy Frisian skates, which were fine for long distances but did not allow of much speed. The stranger, however, although he wore our own kind of skates (which are fastened to the shoes with leather straps), was going at least twenty miles an hour, and soon he had come close enough for me to recognize him. It was the face I would never forget, the face of the hero of my childhood days, Fridtjof Nansen.

When close to the high steel gates of the locks, he stopped abruptly and then looked round to see where there might be a convenient place for him to set foot on land. As I knew that the lock-keepers were apt to



THE DESERTED HARBOUR OF OUR LONELY VILLAGE

keep the water near their locks open in spite of the prevailing temperature and was afraid that the stranger might come to grief, I waved at him and by means of gestures I showed him where it would be safe for him to reach the bank of the canal. He made a gesture to show that he had understood, and a moment later I found him sitting on an old cannon (Holland is full of old cannon, now used for mooring ships), taking off his skates and stamping his feet to restore circulation.

"These skates are all right," he said before I had even had time to welcome him, "but why do people stick to these terrible straps? They cut off all circulation. I think that our Norwegian method of fastening the skates right to the soles of the shoes is a much better one. I hope you won't be offended by my criticism, but I feel as if my feet had been completely frozen."

I answered him that I completely agreed, but I reminded him that we were a people of farmers and fishermen and that farmers and fishermen were apt to be rather conservative.

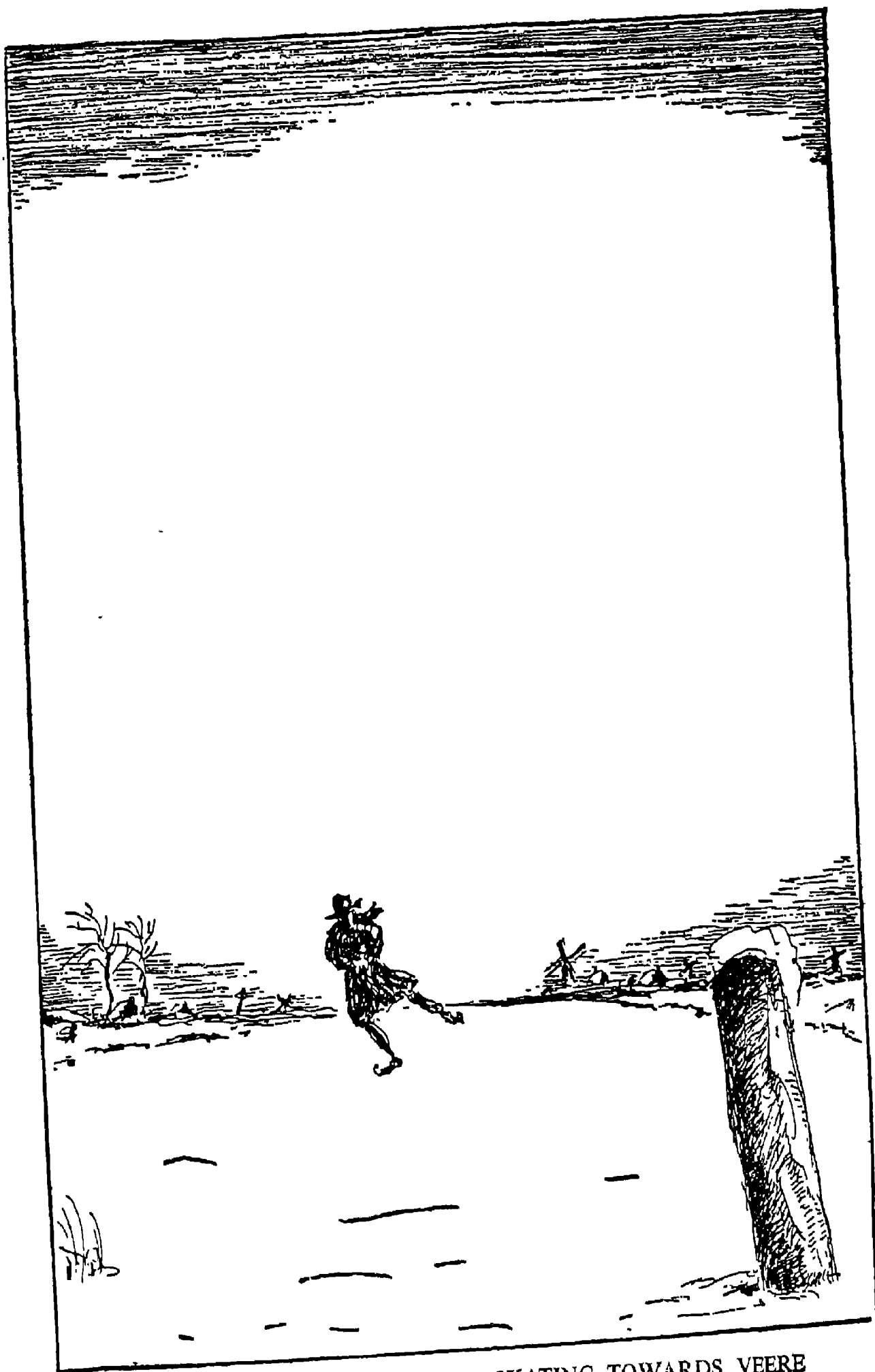
He smiled as he looked up at me. "My dear sir," he said, "you are telling *me* who have spent most of my life with the men of the sea? I sometimes wonder they have been progressive enough to accept the compass!"

Then he got up. "I think I can walk again," he told me, "and now, since you seem to live here, you can perhaps tell me at which house I am expected for dinner to-night. I do not know the names of my hosts, but I have a description of the house." I assured him that he would not be obliged to make much of a search, for I had come to the canal for the express purpose of meeting him. That evening my little white lie did not go down quite so well.

"That is curious," Nansen said, looking me straight in the eyes, "for I myself had no idea that I would come skating in on you this way. I had expected to walk, but in Middelburg, in a second-hand shop, I saw those skates and they were so reasonable I decided to try and see whether I could still use them. I had no money, but they gave them to me for three of my medals, for where I am now, medals are not of much use, but I carried them in my pocket as a souvenir of happier days."

"Then you are fond of skating?" I asked, none too brightly, I am afraid.

"Skating and ski-ing and mountaineering have always been my hobby," he answered, "but all that was long ago. They told me that my heart had given out and that I must be very careful and not exert myself. But this moment I feel as well as I ever did, though I must have gone pretty fast the last two miles or so. And now tell me, do you live here the whole year round and is it always as cold in winter as to-night? For this beats



IT WAS NANSEN WHO CAME SKATING TOWARDS VEERE



Greenland, not to mention Novaya Zemlya, where your ancestors sat and shivered all winter long in their little wooden house and almost died of cold, while if they had only gone out and taken a little normal exercise they would have been as comfortable as we are in Norway."

This remark surprised me, and I asked him, "Then you know about that famous expedition of three centuries ago?"

"Of course I do," he replied. "It was the first regular polar expedition of all time, and I wrote about it in my history of Arctic explorations."

"Then you would be interested in meeting some of the survivors to-night?"

"Of course I would, but how could I? You don't mean to say they are here?"

"Not yet," I said, "at least I have not yet seen them. But we thought it would be rather fun to bring you together, and so we invited three of them. It is now five minutes to seven. In a few minutes we shall know whether they could come."

When a moment later I opened the door of Frits' house, I saw that I need not have worried, for all three of our Novaya Zemlya friends were sitting in front of the open fire, enjoying a glass of hot Swedish punch.

They got up when we entered, and bowed most politely. I wondered at their civility, for I knew that they could never have heard of Fridtjof Nansen or his exploits, since they had died many centuries before the Norwegian had appeared upon the scene. But looking up at Nansen, who towered by my side (and I am almost six foot three), I understood. When Nansen entered a room, people got up. Perhaps it was his eyes which compelled this act of involuntary homage. They were the largest eyes I had ever seen, as well as the bluest. Besides, there was something in them that made you feel, "If this man bids me follow him to hell, of course I will follow."

Nansen seemed completely unaware of the impression he made. He walked up to Erasmus and most cordially shook him by the hand. "After Holbein, my dear Doctor," he said, "you need no introduction. I would have recognized you anywhere. And had I lived a few hundred years earlier, you would have given me a special chapter in your *Praise of Folly*, for surely there never has lived a more foolish tribe of men than we people, who wasted all the happy days we might have spent with our families, travelling endlessly through snow and ice to reach a spot which, if ever it is found, will look very much like those snowy fields through which I passed on my way to your village."

Erasmus, answering slowly in his dignified and antiquated German (for Nansen had used High German in addressing him), shook his head a couple of times and then he asked, "Tell me, were you lonely or

unhappy when you were out there in the midst of your ice and snow and practically alone?"

"Of course not. I was much too busy trying to keep alive."

"And were you ever unhappy and lonely when you were back in civilization?"

"Very often, and I detest what people call civilization."

"Then," Erasmus concluded, "I don't think I could ever have included you in my little book, for you are a wise man indeed. And now let me present you to your fellow-guests. They too were among the wise ones. They came to live in this delightful village."

"But I already know them," said Nansen, with gay eagerness. "You, sir, must be Captain Barents, whose sea I have often crossed on the way to eastern Siberia. And you, sir, must be Captain van Heemskerk. My compliments, sir. You did a most efficient piece of work, bringing your men home safely. And this must be our good Surgeon de Veer, whose book was one of my most cherished possessions when I was a small boy, back in Christiania. I am only sorry that I could not read it in the original Dutch, but I hope you can at least understand me. A little Plattdeutsch and a bit of Norwegian almost equals Dutch, doesn't it?"

"It does," Barents answered, "and my own Terschelling dialect was not so different from what I learned when once I had a crew, half of whom were Norwegians."

"And there is always English," Heemskerk answered.

"Of course there is," Nansen answered.

"And the rest can be said on the flute," de Veer added. "I have brought mine, and when I can no longer follow you I will toot the rest."

The evening had started out most happily, and it continued that way until the old Veere chimes struck the unwelcome hour of midnight. For it was one of those nights when everything seemed to click. The music (although we had very little of it) pleased our guests, and Barents and de Veer were so delighted with Kuhnau's *David and Goliath* that we had to ask Hein to repeat it. Especially the scene in which David slays Goliath and in which you hear the whizzing of the stone after it leaves David's sling filled their simple hearts with joy, although they derived equal pleasure from some of Sweelinck's *Echoes*.

And then Jo, who had already become great friends with the three men from Novaya Zemlya (it is so easy when you speak the same language), told us that dinner was ready, and we left the fireplace and moved over to the dinner-table. None of our guests seemed to be exactly what one might have called gourmets. They had never been in the habit of eating for the sake of eating, but had partaken of food merely to keep alive, and

had often known the pangs of hunger. But the old-fashioned Dutch meal was very much to their taste, and the three Dutchmen were especially delighted with a large dish of fried potatoes which Jo had added as an afterthought. They had never tasted potatoes before and liked them, but whether it was the potatoes themselves which so greatly appealed to them, or whether it was the way they had been fried, I could not tell. I overheard, however, how de Veer said to Heemskerk, "Captain, if we had had these vegetables just once a week, none of our men would ever have had scurvy." In which he was much nearer to the truth than he could possibly have suspected. For it was not until several hundred years after his own expedition that Captain Cook proved the connexion between scurvy and a lack of fresh vegetables. De Veer, however, was a close observer and he may have suspected something about the relationship between fresh fruit and the deadly scourge of all old sea voyages.

The old-style pudding too had been a fine idea, for it reminded the three Dutchmen of their midwinter celebration on Novaya Zemlya, when they had tried to boil a pudding like ours and had been obliged to compromise on pancakes.

But to Frits and me, the most delightful part of the evening came after our guests had had their first taste of a hot cup of coffee (two of them liked it, but Barents complained that it was too bitter for him and asked for another glass of ordinary beer), and when they began to talk shop. There is, of course, nothing more fascinating in the whole wide world than to be present when men who know their jobs well talk shop. It is almost as satisfying as listening to the practising of a great artist. Nor does it matter in the least whether one knows anything about the subject or not. I have had quite as much fun sitting in on a session of football coaches as attending a supper where a couple of astronomers settle down to rearrange the universe. And I shall never forget that evening at the Algonquin when Knute Rockne and Ty Cobb were comparing forward passes and the best way to slide bases. I did not know a thing about either subject, but I had a marvellous time.

It was very much the same at Frits' house when we entertained Nansen and the staff of the Novaya Zemlya expedition. For after the last cup of coffee had been drunk (Barents finally agreeing that with a little practice he might learn to like this strange black liquid), the subject suddenly veered towards tacking. Having once upon a time written a book about ships, I knew in a general way that there was a kind of zigzag sailing known as tacking. But I had never suspected that there were almost as many ways of tacking as there are of preparing eggs. A number of empty plates became polar islands, and a wine bottle—laid on its side—became a sailing-vessel, and then the tacking began. Matches indicated the

currents that were running between the islands and how one could make headway from the south-east to the north-west with a strong wind blowing from the west and a current running east. When the dinner-table proved too small, the dishes and the bottle and the matches were moved to the floor, and Hein joined in, and the famous men, noticing at once that this simple fisherman also knew his business, accepted him as one of their own, and they were having the time of their lives until, with equal rapidity, the conversation switched from tacking to whether one could live on meat exclusively or whether he also needed vegetables.

I was sorry my good friend Stefansson, the great champion of the exclusive meat diet, was not present, for on this occasion the carnivores were in the minority, but meat apparently was only of minor interest to them, and then—again with unexpected abruptness—the talk plunged right into the heart of the subject I wanted to hear discussed most of all—the problem of morale and leadership during a long polar expedition.

Nansen had taken the lead. "A ship's crew," he said, "especially in the Arctic, is exactly like an army. Without discipline, it degenerates immediately into a mob. With too much discipline, it loses all initiative, and the men will sit down in a blizzard and freeze to death rather than find shelter behind some near-by rocks, because no one with a couple of stripes on his sleeve has told them to do so. There have been all sorts of expeditions these last four hundred years, and some came to grief because the sailors stampeded and rushed for the nearest land. Then there was that terrible expedition of Sir John Franklin. I don't think we shall ever know the details, but from the little odds and ends we have found all over King William Island, I feel inclined to say that those poor devils, over a hundred and twenty of them if I remember correctly, were lost because their officers did not know how to assume the right kind of leadership. When you think of where King William Island and Victoria Land are, just beyond the polar circle, why, I think I could have spent a winter there with nothing much more than a gun and an umbrella and an extra change of underwear."

I had read a lot about the Franklin disaster and ventured a question. "Wasn't one of the reasons," I asked, "the fact that the officers let the men do all the work?"

Here Heemskerk interrupted me. "That was all wrong," he said. "You should never tell your men to do anything you yourself would not or could not do."

"Of course not," said Nansen. "You don't have to pull a sledge all the time if you are an officer—you need your strength for other things that are much more important. But, on general principles, the men should realize that you are willing and able to pull your oar or your sledge when

it happens to be your turn and that you can do as well as the others."

Barents sighed. "I know it," he said, "and if that feeling is in your heart—if it is there really and truly—your men will know it, even if you are sick as I was and too weak to be anything but a burden to the others. I shall never forget how good those boys were to me, even when they themselves could hardly stand on their feet."

Here Frits asked the question that was on the tip of my own tongue. "I wonder," he said, "whether you would tell me—for all of you have had a lot of experience—how do you go about it to make the men do what you want them to do?"

Nansen looked at Heemskerk. "You tell him, Captain," he said, "for I don't know."

Heemskerk looked at Barents. "I don't know either, but Willem here is much older than either of us. Perhaps he knows."

But Barents too shook his head. "Maybe it is God's will," he then replied, "that they should obey you. I have been a good Christian—at least, I tried to be—I humbly tried. I believe that everything that happens in this world is foreordained by God. And I am convinced that God wanted certain of his servants to be leaders and others to be followers, even as our Lord was the leader of the blessed Apostles and as the others were his followers.

"That may seem perhaps a little too simple an explanation. But to me it is perfectly clear. I cannot conceive of a world in which there are no captains and mates and plain sailors. Such a world would not make sense. For just as I was always willing to take orders from those whom God had appointed over me (and I am sure my captain here had never any reason to complain of me), so by the same token I expected obedience from those over whom I had been placed."

We had listened very quietly. The old man had been touching in his sublime simplicity. We no longer saw the world that way, but it was a philosophy of life one could respect. It was a point of view which made sense—as long as that particular philosophy of life had prevailed.

But I was immediately attacked by certain doubts. How about Henry Hudson, surely one of the greatest navigators of all times, but a man who had never been able to exercise any kind of leadership—a skipper who had sailed the Seven Seas in ships that had always been hotbeds of mutiny—a captain who had finally lost his life because he had not even been able to control the evil temper of a member of his own family? And how about those other mutinies on the ships of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, that fill some of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of discovery? How about Captain Cook, who was a progressive and liberal

and who, during all his endless years in the Pacific, had never found it necessary to flog a single man, while Bligh, a genius at the business of finding his way through uncharted waters, had literally flogged his way through the Pacific and had accomplished nothing but disaster?

I hoped that Nansen would come to my rescue, and he did.

"Master Willem is right," he said. "He is also right when he says that to-day we no longer find it possible to reduce all these difficult problems to such simple principles. We are, alas, not as devout as our grandfathers used to be. We have got into the habit of asking too many questions. To-day we are not merely satisfied with knowing that the clock runs. We also want to understand what makes it tick. But in one respect, our world has not changed."

"In what respect do you mean, sir?" Frits asked.

"In this particular respect—that unless we have a real love for our fellow-men—nothing sentimental, if you please, for they would not understand that—but a real interest in their well-being, a real desire to be of service to them (though I have come to hate that word 'service' and so please don't misunderstand me)—in short, unless those entrusted to our care feel that we think of them first and long before we even begin to think of ourselves—well then, everything else we do or fail to do is of no earthly use. The men will immediately sense it, and all control is gone."

"You are undoubtedly right, sir," said Frits, "but isn't there something more to it than that? There must be, but what is it?"

Nansen smiled at him as a father might smile at a bright boy who asks a foolish question and then he said, "But don't you see that if we knew what that something was, God would have to go out of business?"

"No," Frits answered, "I don't quite see."

"Because then we would also understand the riddle of existence. And where would the good Lord be after we human beings had succeeded in unravelling his most precious secrets?"

I thought of an answer, but I did not give it. It might have hurt old Willem Barents, and that surely was the last thing I wanted to do.

It was well past eleven o'clock before any of us looked at the clock. Barents showed signs of being somewhat fatigued, and as we had pretty nearly exhausted every problem connected with navigation and exploration, there was a lull in the conversation. As had so often happened before, it was Jo who saved us from having to say, "Well, and what now?" by suddenly bringing in half a dozen plates of *poffertjes*. There is no use trying to describe them to outsiders, for *poffertjes* are the one dish that waxes only in the Low Countries. They are a cross between a very small kind of pancake and a fritter and are the main delicacy of the annual village fairs, when special booths are erected to which loving

couples can withdraw to devour them by the plateful with lots of butter, sugar, and cinnamon, and a rather primitive form of flirting.

It is not easy to fry *poffertjes* in your own kitchen, and you therefore never get them in any private homes. But Jo, with her genius for cooking, had somewhere got hold of an old *poffertje* pan, and there they were as they had been eaten in the Low Countries for the last four centuries. They delighted our Dutch guests, and the Norwegian said they reminded him of something he used to eat as a little boy in Frøen, but whether that was so or whether he merely said it out of politeness, I do not know.

*Poffertjes* make for good feeling, and we told the cook and her husband to come in and join us, but Jo said no, she could not until after she had brought in the mulled wine which she had dug up out of de Veer's description of the midwinter celebration in the Safe Shelter of Novaya Zemlya. A few minutes later the mulled wine came in, steaming hot, in a lovely old pewter decanter such as had been used in the *Behouden Huis*, and Barents said, "This is wonderful! Now, I feel that I am back home!"

And after the last of the *poffertjes* had been eaten, Surgeon de Veer, whom I had presented with a Dutch edition of my book about his voyage, duly inscribed to my "distinguished fellow-author," took out his old wooden flute which he had left with his funny-looking fur coat near the piano and played us the tunes with which he had entertained his fellow-travellers during the long Arctic nights, and like all simple music, these cheering melodies carried us back to happier days as nothing else in the world will do. Then the clock started playing our *Hymn of Thanksgiving*, and de Veer added a flute obbligato of his own, though it was difficult to harmonize it correctly with the chimes, which, being very old, were also very much out of tune.

Next the candles began to flicker, and while their dwindling flames threw weird shadows upon the walls and the ceiling, we watched our guests depart in silence.

It was so cold that before going home I trotted to the tower at the end of the harbour to see what the ice was doing and whether there was any danger of the dikes of the near-by Vrouwenpolder breaking through. The moon was shining brightly across the peaceful island of Noord Beveland. There was an eerie light which made every object throw a heavy black shadow. The Scheldt was completely frozen over, but in the distance a small strip of black water showed where it ran into the North Sea where the ice and the water met. I beheld an old-fashioned sailing-vessel rocking in the waves of the Roompot. From the pictures in de Veer's book, I recognized it as the ship which had carried Heemskerk and his men to Novaya Zemlya. Four dark figures were walking across



OUR POLAR FRIENDS GO HOME



the ice in the direction of the tiny craft. Nansen and Heemskerk were supporting Willem Barents. Behind them, as befitted his place in the hierarchy of the sea, walked the faithful surgeon. He carried a halberd. After all, one never could tell. There might be bears or wolves or foxes and he must be on guard that no harm befall his masters.

When I came home, Jimmie, entirely surrounded by dachshunds (to keep her warm, I suspect), was still up and waiting for me.

"Well," she asked, "did you learn something new to-night?"

"I learned a lot," I answered, "an awful lot." Then I put some more coal on the fire, the dachshunds were dropped into their respective baskets underneath Jimmie's bed and were carefully covered up with several layers of old blankets, and we all went to sleep.

The morning came. It was as glorious and brilliant a day as I had ever seen. Outside hundreds of seagulls were endlessly soaring up and down, fighting and screeching and altogether looking like a blizzard of feathers while awaiting the moment I should come to the door to give them their daily ration of stale bread. I felt very happy. At last I had approached the secret of true leadership. There was nothing supernatural in these heroes of my childhood days. They were merely 'consecrated men' who lived 'consecrated lives' in which the idea of self had been completely repressed that they might devote themselves entirely to the task of looking after the happiness and well-being of those entrusted to their care.

## CHAPTER XXI

### I Get a Cable to Return to America, and So THOMAS JEFFERSON Is the Last of Our Guests as Well as the Most Honoured of All

WE did not have our usual luncheon that next Sunday, for Frits, very early, had driven to Rotterdam to catch a train for Berlin. He had been obliged to go there in connexion with still another loan his firm was floating, but he hoped to return the following Saturday on the Flushing mail train. To our great surprise he was back on Friday and instead of going first to Amsterdam he had come straightway to Veere, after having telegraphed Jimmie from the frontier, asking her to meet him at Flushing. We had postponed our luncheon so that he could join us. He seemed terribly upset, and, as he was a person who did not easily let himself get worried, we wondered what had happened to have given him such a case of the jitters. He had lunched on the train and so he merely drank a cup of coffee while we had our pressed beef. Meanwhile he told us about his adventures.

"Berlin was a nightmare," he began without any preliminaries. "I knew that I would find the situation changed, but I had never expected to see the things that have happened over there."

"You mean that this fellow Hitler will really come into power?"

"Will come into power? Lord help us all, he is in power right now! There is no longer any opposition. The republic is dead and gone. It never had much life, but even the last little spark has now been put out. Of course, the Government goes on, but it no longer means anything. It is as hollow as an old tree. The next gust of wind will bowl it over, and this man Hitler is no longer a gust of wind. He has become a tempest. Soon he will be a hurricane. A hurricane blowing from hell!"

"But surely," said Lucie, who had dropped in to hear the latest news, "it cannot be as bad as all that! France and England will never allow him to come in and take over the Government!"

"France and England won't move a finger," Frits answered. "France is in no position to do anything. Besides, what is France? Where is France? As I told you several weeks ago, there is no France left. France to-day is one large pawnshop run by thousands of small-souled, narrow-minded, pudgy-faced peanut vendors. Whatever business they still do is transacted over the third benedictine after a six-course luncheon and between telephone calls to the lady friends as to where they are to meet

them that evening for dinner. The soldiers go about with their elbows out of their coats and their toes sticking out of their shoes, and if war were to come to-morrow there would not be fifty aeroplanes fit to fly. France will surrender or, if it fights, it will collapse after a couple of weeks. No, forget all about your beloved France, my dear Lucie. I am sorry to hurt your feelings, but *la France héroïque* no longer exists as a power the Germans need worry about. The French people still do a lot of shouting about their democracy, but that democracy has been so completely sold out that nobody believes in it any more."

"Well, but how about England?" asked Jimmie, who has never got over her notion that the England of to-day is still that of Rudyard Kipling. "Surely England will never let Germany start another war!"

"My dear James, many people in England are much more afraid of the Bolshies than of anybody else in this world, and they hope that the Nazis, if only treated the right way (as they call it), will turn east and lick the pants off the wicked Russians. Then England won't have to do that job herself and can go on growing rich, with the Labour Party in its right place and capital on top and the lower classes tipping their caps to their betters."

I felt that it was my turn to add something to this conversation.

"How about America?" I asked.

"Well," Frits answered, "you ought to know more about that than I do. What do you think?"

"I really could not tell."

"Would America care to get mixed up in European affairs after the experience of twenty years ago?"

"It does not seem very likely."

"Well, that leaves me exactly where I began. Nobody will move a finger to stop Hitler if he makes up his mind to go ahead and grab the power in Germany. London and Paris will probably write a few angry letters and next they will tell their people that they have decided to accept the inevitable, that one cannot hope to keep a great nation like Germany down for ever, and then they will all go out for lunch. The French will eat well, and the English will eat badly, but they will all drink a lot, while Hitler will merely nibble at a couple of carrots and give orders to build another thousand aeroplanes and twice as many tanks."

"Is it really as bad as all that?"

"After what I have just seen in Berlin I would say that it is much worse."

"And is that what made you come rushing back a day early?" Jimmie asked.

"Yes. Also on account of my business, for every cent any of us ever

invested in Germany is gone for good and ever. But the main reason I came back was that I wanted to tell Jimmie and Hendrik not to be fools and wait too long. Hendrik has written and has said too many unpleasant things about little Adolf to be safe, and remember little Adolf never forgets."

"What do you mean?" Jimmie asked, instinctively picking up Noodle to protect him against possible harm. "You talk as if we should pack up and leave to-night."

"Of course not! It will take Adolf a little while to get his aeroplanes and his tanks and submarines, for this time the Germans are not going to take any risks. They cannot afford another Versailles and they know it, and it will take them two or three years to build the stuff they need before they can strike. But I know how you love Veere and I am afraid that your days here are over. You would not have the chance of a snowball in hell if the Nazis ever invaded Holland, and they will do it—depend upon that—they will do it!"

"But why? The Dutch have not done them any harm!"

"For God's sake, stop talking nonsense! The Nazis are not the sort to worry about such details, and they have long since struck the word 'morals' out of their new dictionary. They will need Flushing for their attack on England and they will turn Veere into an aeroplane base. A bull-necked Nazi will live in your house, my dear friends, and when we go to Middelburg, we can wave at you when we pass the cemetery and say, 'There they lie! It is too bad. They were such nice people. If only they had left in time!'"

"Perhaps you are right, but this is making it pretty hard for us. What do you want us to do—run away?"

"Of course not, but you told me the other day your publishers wanted you to come to America to see your *Rembrandt* through the press. Why don't you go now and spend a few weeks in America while Jimmie packs up here, for it will take at least two years for Hitler to get ready, and meanwhile she is perfectly safe? So are you, but you might as well make up your mind that our wonderful days here in Veere are over. There is no hurry, but we may as well face the facts as they are and get ready for some safe retreat where we can wait until the storm shall have swept across Europe."

"But how about you? Do you think I would leave you and go back to America alone and then live happily ever after, knowing that you were here?"

"Thanks for the compliment, for I know you mean it. And, of course, I may be a little too pessimistic, but after what I saw last week, I don't see how anybody could be otherwise. But don't worry about me. I don't

write books. I am not in the public eye. I run my little pawnshop and smoke my pipe and read my newspapers and take Millie and the kid out for rides in the car. All the same, even I, the moment I am back in Amsterdam, shall make sure that most of my money will be where no Nazi can ever get at it. So that when I join you in America, I won't send you to the poorhouse.

"No, I can perfectly well stay here and I am not exactly telling you either to run away, for you and Jimmie are not the sort. Only, now that they seem to need you in America for that new book of yours, why don't you take a short trip? You can be in New York by Christmas and you can be back here in Veere in February, and then we can go on with our dinner-parties. In the meantime we will know a little more about what is going to happen and we can stay in Veere until Hitler goes on the warpath. When he does we can take the first boat to England. The Flushing boats get us to England in less than five hours. If the worst comes to the worst we can take Hein's fishing-boat and leave when the Nazis get as far as Middelburg.

"All this sounds pretty sad, but please don't go in for heroics. You can't fight Hitler all alone, and France and England won't lift a finger to stop him. I know that you want to go on fighting him, but you won't be much good after he has plugged a couple of bullets into you. Disappear for a while and do what your publishers asked you to do, and then you come back to us for some more of our dinner-parties. In another two or three years, when the little man in the big brown boots actually starts his attack on England and America—and that is the dream of his life—then you lock your front door, and Jimmie takes little Noodle under her arm, and we will all meet in New York. But get accustomed to the idea right now that our happy days in Veere are almost over. So, by the way, are all the happy days in every other part of the world. The Allies made a mistake at the end of the last war, and now it is too late. We might as well be intelligent about it. Europe is doomed. You go to America and you go right away. The sooner you go, it seems to me, the sooner you will be back. In the meantime, whom have you invited for next Saturday?"

"Another American. I hope you don't mind."

"Not in the least. They have been about the nicest of our guests. Old Benjamin Franklin was a grand person and he was wonderful with those kids. And I shall never forget George Washington! I wish we had a dozen of their kind over here, right at this moment, instead of what we have got—third-rate fellows, without any imagination, commonplace hardware salesmen and stockjobbers, each one of them thinking of just one thing: 'Will I be able to save my own precious skin when the

deluge comes?' Now, who did you say our next guest was—a great American?"

"I personally think that, by and large, he is the greatest American who ever lived."

"That must be your old friend Mr Jefferson. He'll be wonderful!"

"I have already started writing something about him. I hope to have it ready to-morrow evening, but there's so much to say."



"Forget it. I know all about him."

"How come?"

"You gave me a book about him last spring, written by a friend of yours—Nock or some such name."

"I remember. Then I won't have to refresh your memory."

"No, you won't. The book happens to be here, right in my house. I will look through it once more to-night."

The dinner for Mr Jefferson had to be ordered very carefully. For though this noble Virginian dispensed with all outer formalities when he went to live in the President's house, abolished the title of "Excellency" for the chief executive, removed the "Honourable" from all letters to high officials, and would hardly stand for a mere "Sir" on the epistles to the lesser dignitaries, he was exceedingly fastidious when it came to his own daily mode of living. It is true that he never smoked, nor did he drink those violent spirits which were so popular in the colonies during the latter half of the eighteenth century, but he well knew the difference between good wine and the inferior sorts, and in the matter of eating it was undoubtedly quite true what his compatriot Patrick Henry said about him—that he had been abroad so long that he had long since abjured

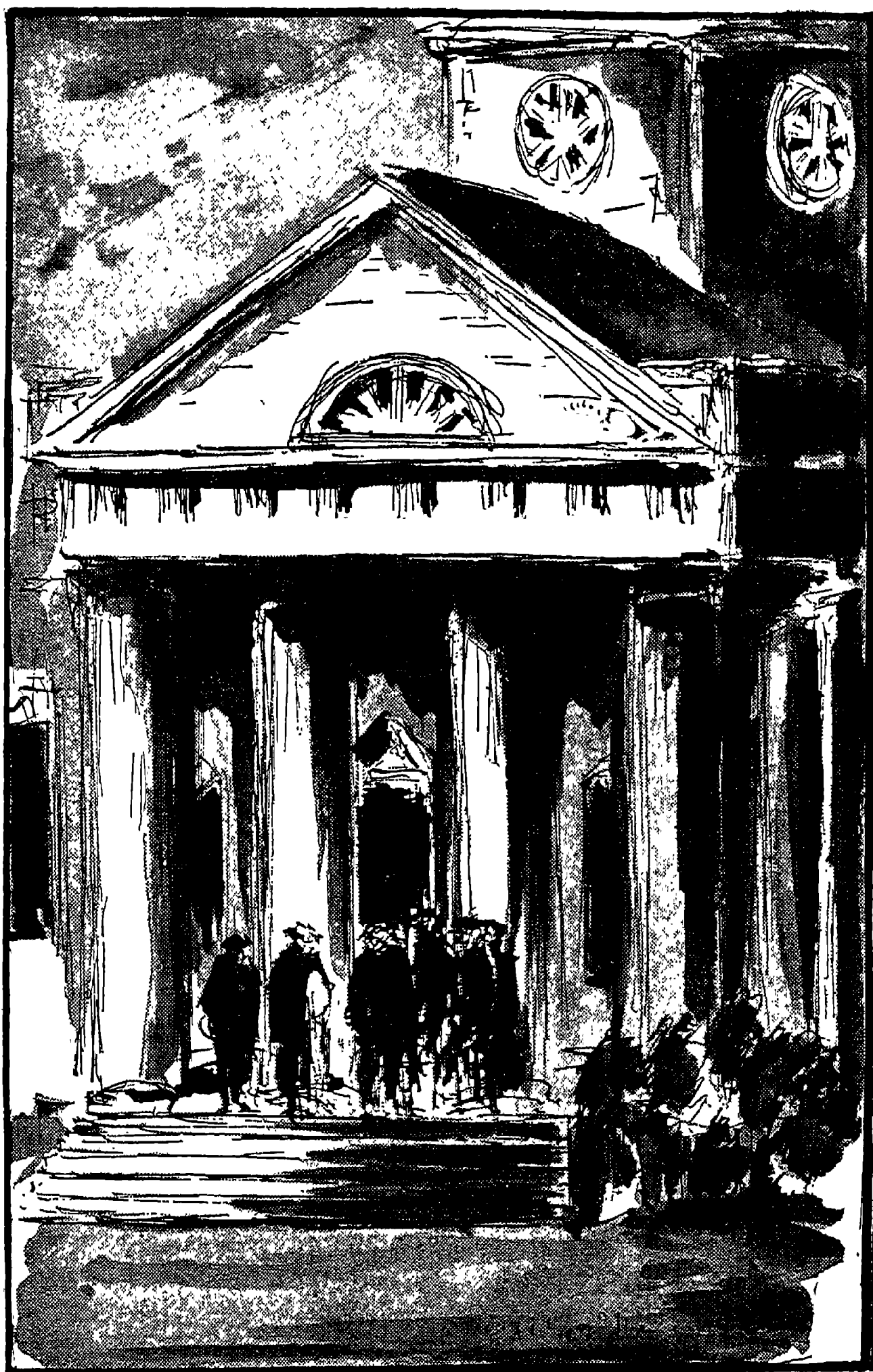
his native victuals in favour of the more delectable viands of the Old World.

Patrick Henry meant to be funny or just nasty when he made this famous statement, but to the democrats of the Henry variety (plain, two-fisted whisky-swillers and snuff-sniffers) there was a quality in Mr Jefferson they never liked. For no matter how simple and unaffected the master of Monticello might be in his personal tastes and how unaffected in his deportment, these brethren of a commoner clay always remained conscious of the fact that intellectually and spiritually their Virginia neighbour was a true aristocrat in that he would either take the best or would do without.

It is true that others with equal pretensions to social prestige were just as much aware of this, as witness Alexander Hamilton's deep dislike for his colleague while he was with him in Washington's Cabinet. But Jefferson was 'genuine' and Hamilton was not. This may be a somewhat crude way of trying to solve the problem of the antagonism that existed between those two very capable men and which made it impossible for them to co-operate. All the same, I think that that was the basis for their cordial detestation of each other. Their respective abilities were of the same high quality, but Jefferson was so superior to most of his fellow-men that he could afford to treat them as his equals. Whereas Hamilton was obliged to assume a superiority he did not really feel and then became the traditional Englishman who has gone to the wrong school, and this in spite of his Scottish antecedents.

This, too, may account for the cordial detestation in which Thomas Jefferson was held by so many members of the clergy, who never ceased to denounce him as an atheist, an infidel, and an enemy of all established religion. They may have been right in the last of these three accusations, but hardly in the first two. Jefferson, who found it difficult to accept what he used to call "established government," wishing to reduce official interference with the lives of private citizens to a minimum, had little love for any kind of tyranny, whether from the Right or from the Left or even from the Middle. He regarded a man's relationship with the Deity as a purely personal affair between the individual and his Creator. He believed in deeds and not at all in mere verbal expressions of good intentions. Whether a human being was a true disciple of Christ, he said on more than one occasion, would be shown by his acts and not by the size of the Bible he carried to church on Sunday or the heartiness with which he joined in the responses.

Jefferson had an intense dislike and a great distrust of personal arguments. "No one will ever change his mind on account of a mere argument," he was fond of saying. "A man may change his mind as a



THE SIMPLE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN OF MONTICELLO



result of his own reflections, of what he has read and slowly digested, but debates are a waste of time, as they will never persuade a person to accept a different point of view from that which he happens to hold."

Religious disputations he held in special abomination. His own relations with God Almighty were so simple that few of his neighbours were able either to follow or understand them. His own notion that one should approach the Lord and talk to Him as one gentleman to another had very little chance of being appreciated among the clergy and the laity of the middle of the eighteenth century, and least of all in a part of country where the general state of education was still as low as in the South.

In the year 1823, being then eighty years old, Jefferson decided that for once and for all he must give some definite and clear expression of his personal attitude towards religion. Until then he had never answered the endless insults and injuries that had been hurled at him for his refusal to take a stand in what were then called "the higher matters." But now, realizing that his days were numbered, he undertook to sum up his private creed in fewer than a hundred words:

"I am a Christian," he wrote, "in the only sense Christ wanted anyone to be His follower. I am sincerely attached to His doctrines in preference to all others. I ascribe to Him every human excellence, believing that He Himself never claimed any others." And in order that his own children and grandchildren should be thoroughly familiar with all that Jesus had said, he collected all the ethical lessons that were to be found in the New Testament, as you can see for yourself if you are ever fortunate enough to lay your hands on a copy of the so-called *Jefferson's Bible*.

All this, however, while no doubt very interesting, had no direct bearing upon the question of what we should offer Mr Jefferson when he should come for dinner. But, in anticipation of that most happy occasion, I had several months before written to an old friend who was a descendant of his sister Martha, who had married his best friend, Dabney Carr. This woman had inherited not only her great-uncle's easy chair—a lovely chair and big enough for me, for Thomas Jefferson too had been over six feet two—but also his mind and his charm and a great deal of his wisdom, and she had told me what dishes Uncle Tom would most likely have asked for. One of those was the spoon bread which we had already served to several of our previous guests. This was the recipe:

- 1 cup of yellow cornmeal
- 1 quart of milk
- 2 eggs
- $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon of salt
- $\frac{3}{4}$  tablespoon of sugar
- 1 rounded tablespoon of butter

Place the milk in a double boiler on the fire. After it becomes piping hot, sprinkle in lightly all dry mixture, stirring it at the same time and continually stirring it until it becomes thick. Let it cook one hour. After this beat eggs all together and stir them in with the butter. Place in a baking-dish and cook thirty minutes in oven (400°) or until brown.

Spoon bread, however, does not a dinner make. I would have to add something a little more substantial, and so I had to find out whether there was anyone in Middelburg who could make waffles, for although the Dutch waffle is not at all like its American namesake, being a much thinner and more delicate creature, I thought it would be nice to let Jefferson feel as if he were back in Virginia by serving hot waffles with sugar and cinnamon at about eleven o'clock, a few hours after the regular meal. I asked Jimmie to go to Middelburg and see whether perhaps the people of the Abdij could give her the address of a waffle baker. Meanwhile I was spending the morning in Jo's kitchen, watching her make *hutspot* and trying to get up a menu that could be served as a background for the spoon bread.

Since Jefferson had always been so deeply interested in cheap and popular foodstuffs, I thought that we ought to begin with a *potage à la Camérani*, which would give him both macaroni and Parmesan cheese. Then a few *côtelettes de saumon Dorigny*. We would need some very good Madeira for our salmon, but we could get it in Middelburg. With these slices of salmon, Jo was to serve very small boiled Dutch potatoes. As the *pièce de résistance*, I had thought of duck. A *canard à la broche*—a duck roasted over an open fire—has always seemed to me the best way to prepare that kind of fowl, and Jo could stuff the ducks with chestnuts, champignons, and those olives which had been one of Jefferson's favourite fruits.

Instead of having more potatoes (a good Dutchman will eat potatoes with everything from soup to dessert) we could have spoon bread with the duck, and instead of vegetables there would be a large bowl of fresh lettuce and a plain French dressing made with tarragon vinegar, one hard-boiled egg per person, and some leeks rather than the conventional onion.

For our dessert I ordered a *sabayon chaud au vin de Porto*. That was light and fitted in with Jefferson's preference for light meals. After dinner, instead of whisky (which he detested) or more wine, I meant to present our ex-President with a cup of *slemp*. He must have drunk a lot of *slemp* when he was in the Low Countries while in search of those loans that were so badly needed by the young American republic he had just helped to found.

When I was young *slemp* was still a very popular beverage in winter. On cold nights we used to drink it all evening long, and it was especially

popular when we went skating. There were little '*slemp* tents,' flying a big Dutch flag, all over the frozen landscape, and as the stuff was completely harmless, we drank it by the bucketful.

Not finding the recipe in the modern cookery books, I went to consult Lucie, who was an inexhaustible fountain of information upon every culinary subject connected with the days of our ancestors. She asked to be excused a moment, went into her parlour, and almost immediately reappeared with a recipe for *slemp* which she remembered having seen in a cookery book her great-great-grandmother had started to write in the year 1746, when all great ladies were also supposed to be great cooks. She copied it and gave it to me, and here it is:

2 quarts of milk  
a pinch of saffron  
1 tablespoonful of tea  
8 cloves  
3 inches of stick cinnamon  
a pinch of mace  
 $\frac{1}{8}$  pound of sugar  
2 tablespoons of cornmeal

Put all the spices and the tea into a small bag like an ordinary tea bag. Drop the bag into the milk and start it boiling very slowly. From time to time, take the spice bag between two forks and squeeze the juice out of it. After about half an hour, add the cornmeal and the sugar. Then let everything simmer for another five minutes and serve it in teacups.

Of course, Jefferson might have a terrific aversion to this concoction. However, as it was easy to make and much cheaper than hard liquor, he would undoubtedly be interested in this beverage as something that might have been introduced among his Virginia neighbours to wean them away from the dangerous products of their stills. He had spent the latter half of his life looking for such substitutes but never, I am afraid, had found them.

When you are going to entertain a man of as wide tastes as Thomas Jefferson had been, the subject of music too had to be thought out with more than usual care. Our guest had been a very competent fiddler before he had suffered that accident on horseback which left him with a perpetually stiff arm. But even after he had ceased to play himself, he had kept up his interest in music and, by ordering all the best compositions that were published in London and Paris, he had always been well informed about all the latest novelties for both the violin and the pianoforte.

But how far back had he gone? Had he known Bach and Handel? Or the great Italians of the seventeenth century? I thought he probably had and I asked Hein to start our evening's concert with Bach's motet,

*Jesu, meine Freude*, and let this be followed by the first two records of Handel's *Water Music*. Then the first part of Karl von Dittersdorf's String Quartet No. 6, in A major, and Haydn's "The Heavens are Telling," from *The Creation*.

But I remembered that he could not possibly have heard a great deal of orchestral music. Even to-day the Government residing in the capital of the great nation Jefferson helped to found does not think it necessary to support a symphony orchestra and leaves this matter to private initiative. Therefore, I felt that it would be perhaps wiser to let the rest of the programme consist of very simple melodies, such as records of parts of Bach's Italian Concerto, the first part of his Toccata in D major, Haydn's Minuet in C sharp minor, and Castagnetta's rendition of Bach's "Chromatic" Fantasia and her three short pieces from *The Well-tempered Clavichord*, which she had sent me a short time before.

I also promised myself that if possible I would get our guest to talk a little upon the subject of music as part of a programme of public well-being. He was, as far as I can remember, our only President to whom music had meant something more than a hymn and *I've Been Working on the Railroad*. It would be nice to find out what he felt upon the subject.

I did not look forward to any spectacular mode of approach on the part of Mr Jefferson. I expected that he would come on horseback, and so he did, riding a fine Virginia mare which he examined most carefully after his arrival.

"There was so much snow," he explained, "that she slipped several times, but I don't think that any harm has come to her. By the way, I notice that you have a stable-boy ready to take care of her." (I had asked our local livery-stable man to be at Frits' house at seven o'clock.) "That was very thoughtful of you, but how could you guess that I would come on horseback?"

"I remembered the fourth of March of the year 1801," I answered.

"Oh, that silly story about my inauguration! As a matter of fact, I did not even go on horseback, as people still seem to say. I walked. It was much the safer way. I could, of course, have taken my coach, but with Pennsylvania Avenue one long mud puddle, it seemed much wiser to go on foot. And also, I needed the exercise. Later, I needed it even more, for being President of the United States is hard work. You are never master of your own time. Just when you want to go out for a little fresh air, some bore is sure to walk in, and, of course, you've got to see him, and he promises you that he will take only five minutes of your valuable time, but he stays five hours! In the end, you are no wiser than you were before he came, but you have lost your chance at the fresh

air. You are quite sure they will know how to take care of my horse? I am devoted to the animal."

"My dear sir, these people have taken care of horses and have loved them for the last three hundred years, so you really need not worry. And now, won't you please come in? It is cold, and you must feel tired after your long ride."

Erasmus and Frits were waiting for us, and we had (encouraged by our party of the week before) taken the liberty of inviting Lucie and Jimmie. I knew that Jimmie would appeal to the former President because of her gift for figures and her love of facts and on account of that practical common sense which was perhaps her most outstanding quality, whereas Lucie, who was a direct throwback to the eighteenth century, would remind him of all the many charming women by whom he had been surrounded during most of his life. Lucie even bore (at least, I thought so) a slight resemblance to his beloved Martha. In this I had guessed right, for just before we went to table he took her gently by the hand and said, "It will not only be an honour but a pleasure for me, madam, to spend an evening sitting by your side. You remind me of one whom I held dearer than life itself, for you have Martha's smile. There were not any Wayleses among your ancestors, were there?"

"I'm sorry," Lucie answered. "All my people were either Dutch or French. There is not a drop of English blood in my veins."

"Then it is only my great good luck that you should be the way you are," and he handed her into her chair with such exquisite elegance that I could well understand why the awkward Adamses had always disliked him so thoroughly and had denounced him for his so-called aristocratic leanings.

On a social basis Monticello and Quincy had never been able to understand each other. At times they had dropped their private differences to work for the common good of the republic, but as for inviting each other to dinner—no, that had been out of the question if it possibly could have been helped.

Jo's Zeeland costume greatly interested our guest, and he asked Lucie to tell him in detail how it was arranged.

"It takes thirty-eight pins to put it on the correct way," Lucie informed him.

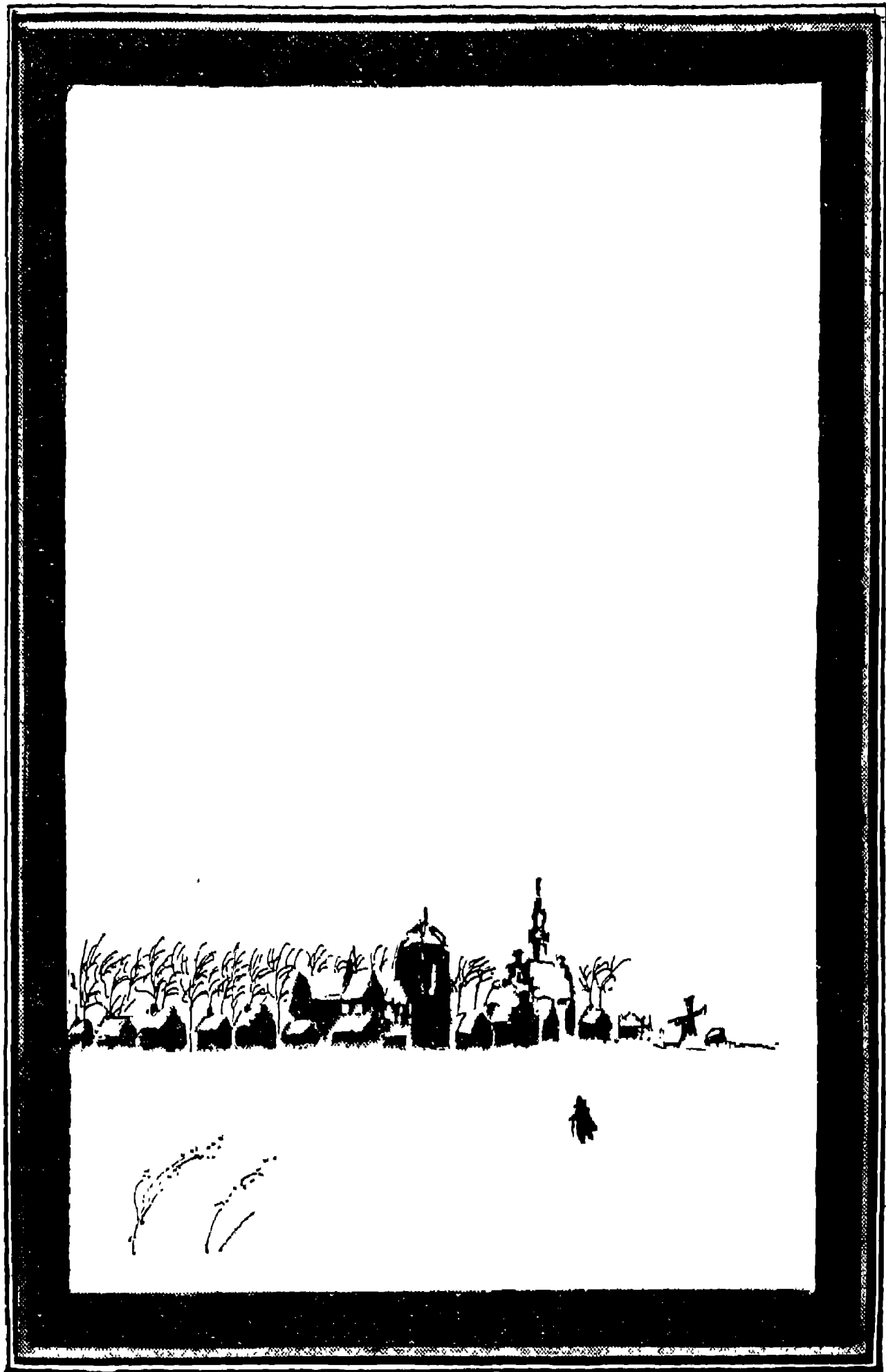
"Thirty-eight pins! Every morning! Doesn't that mean a lot of time just wasted and isn't it horribly impractical?"

"It could not possibly be less practical," Lucie agreed.

"Then why do women go on wearing it?"

"Your Excellency knows why," Lucie answered.

"You may as well call me Mr Jefferson, ma'am."



VEERE IN WINTER

"I know that I have your permission, sir, but I have not got my own."

"That is curious! And why not?"

"Does Your Excellency see that Rembrandt etching on the wall over there?"

"I do, ma'am."

"How would it look in a cardboard frame?"

"Not so well, I'm afraid. It seems to need just that kind of frame."

"There Your Excellency has his answer," Lucie continued, "both why I shall go on giving you a title which provides you with the right frame and why these girls continue to wear their impractical clothes."

"They make them look lovely. Is that what you meant to imply, ma'am?"

"Your Excellency reads my mind like a book."

"And a delightful book it is, Madame Lucie, and in exactly the right kind of binding."

"Thank you, Monsieur Thomas."

"Your very good health, Madame Lucie."

"*Merci*, Monsieur Thomas, and yours."

But it was not only with Lucie that Jefferson was right away at home. He had been delighted to make the acquaintance of Erasmus, whose *Colloquies* and *Praise of Folly* he had read at college. With Jimmie, he at once got lost in a serious discussion of the metric system, which, however, did not lead very far, as both of them fully agreed that America had made a terrible mistake when immediately after the French Revolution it had failed to adopt the metric system and had stuck to the cumbersome old English method. But the metric system had been devised by revolutionaries, as Jefferson observed, and that, of course, had been enough to make it highly suspicious in the eyes of all good patriots who had prayed day and night for the defeat of the wicked regicides in Paris.

What made the author of the Declaration of Independence such an ideal guest was the fact that he was one of the most observant men we had ever met. He noticed everything, absolutely everything. He immediately remarked upon the macaroni in the soup, and this led to a discussion of the best way to feed the poorer classes, especially in the more backward frontier regions, where it was very difficult to avoid an almost unbearable monotony.

The olives in the duck's stuffing caused him to explain his own efforts to grow olive-trees on his estate in Virginia. And the champignons made him regret the conservatism of most people in the matter of food, which prevented them from eating all sorts of cereals and fruits which would

have been excellent for them from every point of view if only they had been able to overcome their foolish prejudices.

"Now take rice," he said. "It has marvellous food values. I experimented with rice all my life. It grows in the valley of the Po, and so there is no reason why it should not grow equally well in Virginia and in Georgia and in Kentucky. But our people would not eat it. They would rather starve than eat it. Take French endives. I imported them from France to take the place of the salads which do not grow so well in our hot climate. But it was hopeless. I did my best to make each of our farmers raise a few endives in their own gardens. They refused—every single one of them. None of that 'foreign fodder' for freeborn Americans.

"Then there was broccoli—a fine substitute for cauliflower. I raised some of it in Monticello, but my neighbours would not touch it. And there was this macaroni, which the Italians had found to be an excellent staple for those who had large families and were too poor to buy anything else. But even the poorest of my day labourers would have none of it. And think of the wines we could have grown! Wine, to my way of thinking, is one of the necessities of life and it is also the best antidote for the bane of whisky, that vile stuff which has killed more of our young men than all the wars we ever fought. I used to take my neighbours over my place and show them my vineyards. Then they went home and built themselves another still.

"And finally, there was a practical and handy kind of democracy I tried to introduce. It consisted of equal rights for all and special privileges for none. It was ideally suited for our soil, and I am convinced that we could have made it work too, if we had seen to it that each man had got his own little plot of land, for that is the only way to make any kind of democracy work. Give every man and woman a bit of soil they can call their own, and at the same time you will instil into them a feeling of responsibility for the whole of the community.

"Look at those big cities in France and England! I visited all of them when I was in Europe. I was not in a hurry. I spent considerable time in most of them. I studied them carefully. Ninety per cent. of the people who lived in those towns had nothing, never had had anything, and never would have anything they could call their own. Why should they have been interested in what happened to the other 10 per cent. or in the country as a whole? But the moment you gave them a few acres of land—even less—which they could really call their own, they were eager to work for it, willing to fight for it, and, if necessary, to die for it. I tried to make my friends in Congress see it that way, but as soon as I began to ride my hobby, they would smile vaguely and tell me they had a very



important appointment and would I please excuse them. And ~~they~~<sup>they</sup> would be, and I would not see them again until a week later."

Here Mr Jefferson halted abruptly and, turning to Lucie, said, "But I am afraid that all this must bore you, my dear ma'am, almost as much as it used to bore poor Alexander Hamilton."

Lucie smiled at him. "I thought that Your Excellency told me a moment ago that he did not like Mr Hamilton. Or did I read that in the book our host gave me last night?"

"Again, ma'am, you win. Pray forgive me for being so clumsy, and remember that I am a bit out of practice. It is a long time since I was engaged in one of these pleasant verbal duels. And now, if you will pardon me, I would like to propose a toast."

I got up, and addressing him directly, I said, "And if you will pardon me, sir, it is I and not you who will propose that toast. But I am sure it will be the same toast as you would have given, and so it does not really matter which of us speaks."

Then lifting my glass I said, "To the nation you founded, sir. May it some day become what you hoped to make it—a beacon of justice and fairness to guide all mankind towards a happier future."

Jefferson thanked me with a slight bow of the head. Then he remained silent for quite a while, but soon his ideas had become formulated. "I thank you for your gracious words, my dear fellow-citizen," he said, raising his own glass, "for with all my respect for your native land, which taught me much, I still feel that no greater honour can befall any man than to be called a citizen of our beloved republic. Yes indeed, I thank you, and from the bottom of my heart. You remarked a moment ago that I had helped to found a nation which you hoped might some day become a beacon of justice and righteousness. I noticed that you used the qualitative clause. Let me change that just a little. Let me express the firm conviction that it will actually do so, and ere long. And now enough of this, for here I am talking again as if I were delivering a speech in Congress and, as you know, I never was a believer in long orations. They are a waste of time and they settle nothing. So let us spend the rest of the evening trying to remember that God gave us this world for the express purpose of our being happy in it—all of us!

"You told me when I arrived that you had some special music for me. If the ladies won't mind, would you play it for me?"

At all our former parties we had begun the dinner with music so as to break the ice and make every one feel at ease. But to-night the talk had been so animated from the very beginning that I had told Hein to forget about his gramophone. I now asked him to turn it on and to start with Handel's *Water Music* while Jo passed the waffles. They had been

ght by a boy on a bicycle, and the poor lad was half frozen after his long trip through the snow, so we put him in the kitchen to get thawed out and to have his share of waffles, for although he delivered them every day, he rarely got a taste of his master's products. As for the rest of the party, we were in a mood of such perfect contentment with ourselves and with the world at large that we did not bother to move over to the fire but merely pushed our chairs back a little to make ourselves entirely comfortable and remained where we were.

In this way we passed the next hour, and then Hein turned on Bach's *Well-tempered Clavichord*. Jefferson listened intently. "What charming melodies!" he said. "I never heard them before. I don't know how they



escaped my attention. That first piece—it is so simple. I would have liked to play an obbligation to it."

"Perhaps you would care to do so now," I said.

"But you have only a piano, and I can't play it. I used to be a fiddler, but with that bad arm of mine, there is not much left I can do. Just the same, this is so much like olden times, I wonder whether you have a fiddle in this delightful house, where you seem to have everything else needed to make life happy and beautiful?"

"I have two violins here."

"You have? How wonderful! Will you let me see them? What are they?"

I took my violins out of their cases. I had brought them with me because I had anticipated—or rather, I had hoped—that something like this might happen. Mr Jefferson was especially delighted with the Amati, a very early one and therefore somewhat smaller than the later models. Not very powerful of tone, but with a most agreeable voice, like that of an Italian singer who has not been spoiled by the Scala or the Metropolitan.

"This one would suit me best, but my fingers must be terribly stiff after a hundred years without any practice."

The fingers proved to be less unobliging than he had expected, and he took the utmost delight in trying to discover how much he had lost and how much he had retained, and when the gramophone stopped he was so carried away by his own enthusiasm that he went on playing the simple tunes he remembered from his childhood days. I knew most of them too, and taking the other violin, the modest Serafino, I played the second part (making them up as best I could), and our concert might have gone on until the hour of departure, but at half-past eleven the telephone rang.

This was a most unusual occurrence, for the postmaster always went to bed at ten and never got up except in case of high emergency. All of us therefore felt that something very unusual must have happened, and as always on such occasions, we held our breath and while we pretended not to be listening, we tried to catch every word that was being said.

The call seemed to come from Amsterdam, and apparently it was Frits' partner who was talking. Their conversation did not last long, and then Frits told us that his partner had called him up to inform him that, according to the news on the Exchange that afternoon, Hitler would become Reichsführer the day after next or just as soon as old Hindenburg would be well enough to go through the necessary ceremonies.

Jefferson noticed our consternation and discreetly inquired whether anything very serious had happened. Perhaps we had lost a friend or relative?

"No, sir," I told him, "not exactly a relative, but a very dear friend. She is still alive, but God only knows how much longer we shall have her with us."

Then I hesitated. Should I tell him that the name of this friend was Liberty? Or should I spare him the grief of knowing that that ideal, for which he himself had so valiantly fought all his days, was on the point of being destroyed in every country of this earth and that it could not possibly survive unless our own beacon began to burn brighter than ever and right away, too?

I looked at Lucie. She understood. "Won't Your Excellency play us once more that tune he had just begun when he was interrupted?" she asked. Jo too, with her fine sense for the right thing at the right moment, felt that something must be done to allay his suspicion that something had gone very much wrong. She suggested a third round of waffles, but there were not any. The hungry boy had eaten them all, and he was now fast asleep. But there was still plenty of *slomp*, and the hot drink took Jefferson back to the days he had spent in the Low Countries, trying to



THOMAS JEFFERSON TRIED OUT MY BEST FIDDLE

raise funds for the Revolution, and he entertained us most amusingly with stories about the great-grandfathers of the men and women with whom we ourselves had grown up and in whom we recognized many of the characteristics of their ancestors.

That was all. As Veere houses had been built in the days before ventilation had been invented, the air in the room was growing pretty bad. We therefore opened the door. Outside the night was of a particularly clear beauty. Millions of stars were shining brightly. Our beloved village looked more peaceful than ever. Just before midnight Thomas Jefferson once more picked up my Amati.

"Do you by any chance remember this melody?" he asked, and he played us an old version of *Drink to Me Only with Thine Eyes*. I did remember it and once more played the second part while Lucie and Frits hummed the words.

A few minutes before twelve o'clock the bells of the tower chimed in with Valerius' *Hymn of Thanksgiving*. The violin began to sing softer and softer while the bells gradually increased in strength. In this way Thomas Jefferson once more slipped out of our lives. The clock struck twelve and we were alone with our thoughts. The noblest champion of freedom the world has ever seen was gone while the dread spectre of tyranny was rapidly descending upon earth.

Four days later I was on my way to America. Exactly five weeks later I was back in Veere. Nothing had happened. Outwardly everything was as it had always been. But a change had come over the world, and neither Frits nor I felt in the mood to go on with our dinner-parties. At least, not for the moment. Some other day perhaps, but not now.

"The music has gone out of our lives," as Jo so aptly put it when one day we were sitting in her kitchen and were finishing the last few drops of the cognac that had been left after Thomas Jefferson's visit.

"But no more weeping, if you please," she added. "Do you remember what our ancestors used to say when everything went wrong? *Ende desespereert niet*. Whatever we do, let us never despair. So here is to good health and here is to our love for each other and here is to hope."

Jimmie, Lucie, Frits, and I looked at each other and repeated Jo's prayer "Here is to hope!"

# Here Are the People we Invited, Together with the Chapters in Which They Make Their Appearance in This Book

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Concerning the PEOPLE in this book . . . none  
of the characters in this book  
is fictitious

JIMMIE is Mrs van Loon. She got her nickname shortly after she had graduated from Bryn Mawr. She became famous under it many years ago, and it has stuck to her ever since.

LUCIE is Mrs Lucie van Dam van Isselt, the very distinguished Dutch painter who lived for almost twenty-five years in Veere. We have not heard of her since the invasion of the Netherlands and we wish to heaven she had stayed on this side of the ocean when she visited us shortly before the outbreak of the war. As she loathed everything German, her fate cannot be a happy one, but we have been unable to get a word of news from or about her.

FRITS was Frits Philips, a member of the well-known Dutch tribe of radio and electric-bulb manufacturers. He himself was a banker by profession but with a very decided literary streak. He is no longer alive. His death was the result of his proverbial kindness. He had promised his small daughter to take her to the movies. It rained cats and dogs, and Frits, who had caught a cold, was told to stay at home. But he did not want to disappoint the child. He went, and a serious ear infection was the result. Everything was done to save him, but he never recovered from the operation. He lies buried in the cemetery of Zalt Bommel, the original home of the Philips dynasty. Perhaps it is just as well. The moment the Nazis had begun to look for the best beloved among the younger Dutchmen that they might murder them as an example to the others, they would have taken Frits prisoner and would have shot him as a hostage.

JO VERLINDE was the wife of HEIN VERLINDE, a local fisherman and a sort of small-town philosopher. Jo, being a most enterprising creature, ran the village boarding-house and on occasion (if she happened to like you very much) she would come and help out with the cooking. We hope that they are both still alive, but Jo may be obliged to feed the Nazi garrison of Veere and she will hate it.

KAATJE, our second maid, left us and married a workman in the Flushing shipyards. God only knows what has become of her since the Nazis invaded Walcheren and burned down Middelburg.



PERRELS was the village constable who by his own effort <sup>CHAD</sup> worked himself up to the post of keeper of the archives. He died several years before the war.

REPKO, for all we know, may still be shaving the good people of Veer, selling them their cigars and their insurance, and officiating as town treasurer. He was a clever boy from Amsterdam with a cautious tongue in his head. We hope he has been careful not to offend present masters of our beloved village.

Little NOODLE survived many peregrinations and reached a happy <sup>IX</sup> age in the Nieuw Veere in Connecticut. He now sleeps content <sup>VIII</sup> (with his little paws tucked away underneath his wise head) <sup>V</sup> behind the bird-bath in our garden, where he enjoys the company of all the birds in this part of Connecticut who take pride in keeping their plumage in shipshape order or who desire a refreshing drink.

As for VEERE itself, shortly after the invasion it almost was destroyed during an attack on near-by Flushing. Fortunately, the bombs fell into the harbour during low tide and exploded in the mud without causing very serious damage.

